THE LIFE OF MONSIGNOR ROBERT HUGH BENSON

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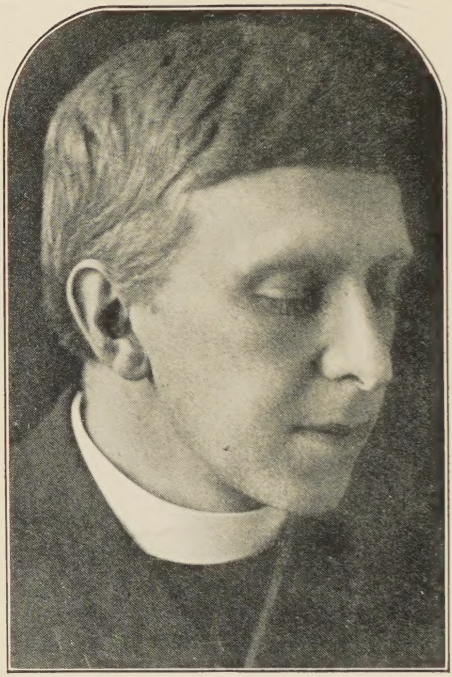


ROBERT HUGH BENSON

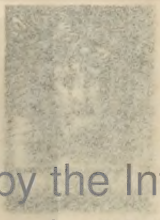
From a photograph in the possession of Bernard Merefield, Esq.

THE LIFE OF MONSIGNOR ROBERT HUGH BENSON

BY

C. C. MARTINDALE, S.J.

AUTHOR OF "THE GODDESS OF DELPHI," ETC.



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VOL. I

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS

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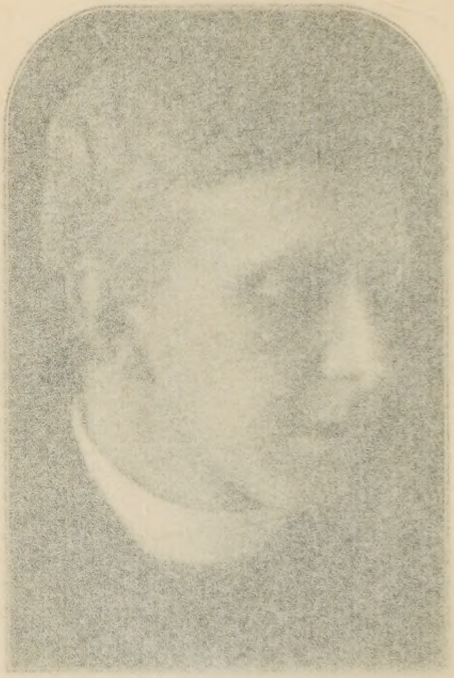

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TO HUGH'S MOTHER

I could not even contemplate, dear Mrs. Benson, offering these pages to anyone but you, not only for the sake of the active good-will with which you sanctioned the suggestion that I should write them, and of the help you have all the while so generously given me, but because when once I had read the letters that passed between yourself and Hugh, I simply had no choice. In his life he had your unique affection, profound and permanent; all of that life that by God's law he might, he gave to you; it would be robbing, so to say, the altar, if I kept back, or offered elsewhere, this biography (diffidently written, believe me, and blazoning in every paragraph the consciousness of its inadequacy).

Asking myself, then, how I ought to try to write it, I remembered that you once said to him about a more famous biography:

"There isn't a shadow on the whole portrait. Just imagine it. I am going to hint gently that even glaciers have shadows, and very blue and delicious ones too—and to ask for the mention of a few endearing faults (I don't believe his were, but I shall ask all the same)."

And as one long a friend of yours so emphatically reminded me, "Il faut respecter le type que Dieu cherche à produire en nous."

So, while I certainly would never have been able, I most assuredly have never wished, to write a vie de sacristie, *I have*

tried hard to say what I saw, including his faults—though not as faults (even if so they seemed), but as facts; nor indeed even to "endear" him, but to communicate him, to offer him to anyone who reads this just as he was, in his tremendous effort to realise in himself that which he believed God wanted him to be. And to speak for one moment grandiloquently, I have had to try to treat this "Life" as a psychological study, or not at all. As mere annals, a list of things done, or as a mere study of a littérateur's output, it was inconceivable.

And it is my private consolation that you have read, for yourself, every word of this book, and that you have approved. It was his practice to read his manuscripts to you; I could not do better than to imitate him at least thus far.

To be able to love and venerate one's fellow-man is perhaps the highest human privilege; to live with the beloved and honoured is an added grace. To you I owe, then, this great thing, that I have spent at least this year, despite its constant distractions, in close intimacy with your son, whom, as the manner of this life is, I saw so little. My affection for him was established before I began to write; now it is increased, and the more solidly made firm. To his mother I do not shrink from making that avowal. You were (of course) certain that it would be so. Yet you will not despise my assurance that you were wholly right.

Very sincerely yours,

C. C. MARTINDALE.

TREMANS,
January 1916.

INTRODUCTION

When, at the very kind request of Mr. A. C. Benson, I undertook to write his brother's life, I did so with the most sincere diffidence; partly because I doubted whether a "life" were the proper way of doing homage to the memory of a man like Robert Hugh Benson, who never did anything externally massive or officially important, nor ever held any notable public position, as his father did, and whose influence, as far as I could judge, flowed chiefly from his vivid but elusive personality and magnetism. Memoirs, I felt, like or unlike those which have appeared, or rapid pen portraits by his intimate friends, were more suited to convey his varied and fleeting moods than was a volume.

Further, my acquaintance with Mgr. Benson was relatively slight; of late years his communications had been reduced to the minimum necessary for intelligibility—thus, he would forward to me letters he had received, with brief legends, in his angular hand, black across the writing: *Can you help this man?—he seems honest;* or, *Are there any books on this?* or, *Is this nonsense? Can you send me a note? So sorry!* The topics he inquired about were mainly theosophical and the like, or dealt with quaint by-paths of religion.

Again, it seemed to me that any book on Mgr. Benson which failed to insist primarily on his utterly personal and interior moods, motives, and attitudes would wholly

miss the point on every more important occasion calling for interpretation, and there is a very natural and justified repugnance in many readers (not to mention the writer) for curious inquisition into the sanctities of a man's soul, be he never so "public" in his career.

Then, the only rebuff I encountered when, having undertaken the writing of this biography, I tried to collect material, came from one who commented on "this general conspiracy to present [Mr. R. H. Benson] as a miracle of genius and of virtue." It was presumed that I would continue this "elaborate hymn of unmeasured eulogy." The writer, being "an enemy to wax-busts with pink cheeks and china blue eyes," declined all assistance. I was thus reminded that a hymn of hero-worship was undoubtedly being asked for by many of Mgr. Benson's admirers, and I was conscious that I could not supply even one stanza of what in any case he would so wholeheartedly have hated. Yet, on the other hand, I observe that a man of undoubted education is seriously maintaining that the Jesuits hated Benson and hastened his death by poison. This notion, entertaining in itself, though emanating, one would think, from another age, or race, or planet, none the less suggested that eccentric motives might be imputed for any less laudatory paragraph I might feel it my duty to write.

Yet, for the sake of the warm affection and admiration I have felt for Hugh Benson, the privilege of speaking of him appeared too great to be refused, nor was it indeed easy to disregard the offer of Mr. A. C. Benson, to which the sanction of the Cardinal Archbishop of Westminster had been so cordially added.

It has therefore been my effort, after this so egotistic introduction, to exclude my personal judgments, prefer-

ences, and surmises from these pages, and by making an almost pedantic use of the great quantity of "documents" I have been able to use, to state nothing which is not fully supported by the evidence. In writing the history of a mind, not just of actions or events, this has not always been quite easy. Yet, striving to work inwards from outside, I have not hesitated to accumulate a number of small details, quite trivial and exterior in themselves, convinced that in the superficial phenomenon was to be detected an expression of, or key to, the real man. Nothing has been asked for out of mere curiosity, nor related from sheer love of gossip. And indeed, to those who at any rate knew and loved him, even these trivialities may be dear; while to others, again, the echoes of his voice—speaking things not necessarily important, even, or original—may bring some portion of the help and consolation it brought, already long ago. What I have said, I have checked constantly by submitting it to the opinion of all (I think) of Monsignor Benson's close associates, and, whenever this has been possible, by sending it in proof to those who so kindly had supplied the data for it.

It will be understood that I have believed that no true homage is paid to a life like Hugh Benson's, by treating it as if it had been one of achieved perfection from the outset; that he never changed, never increased, was a Saint in his cradle, or grew, even, towards sanctity, without many a growing pain, much inequality of development, much momentary loss of interior equilibrium. A man's very faults are not so discreditable as the good use he may make of them is honourable; and self-development always implies self-conquest.

Finally, while I have most earnestly hoped not to wound the feelings of anyone, Catholic or non-Catholic,

of what avail is it to forget that he was, on the one side, a Catholic priest, passionately eager to spread Roman Catholicism and fiercely antagonistic to alien creeds, even when tenderly devoted to many who might hold them; on the other, that he was unlike, and knew himself to be unlike, and wanted to be unlike, a type of Catholic priest which is by many held to be so general, so deliberately produced, as alone to be satisfactory? In all cases I have hoped to be purely objective: it has been my business not to preach, nor to edify, but to relate; and even when the subject of the narration is a mood, an emotion, a spiritual phase, not adequately expressible in any written document, I have honestly hoped that I might not first put into him what I afterwards discover in him, but that I might quite simply tell as much of the truth as I saw. May so much of *apologia* be pardoned me.

I would first thank most sincerely the unselfish kindness of Mrs. Benson, without whose unique help anything written on her son must be relatively unavailing; Mr. A. C. Benson, for the vivid illumination which not alone his memoir of *Hugh*, but his many letters and his conversations have continuously shed upon dark places; Mr. E. F. Benson, and Miss Tait. Particularly, too, I am grateful for the genial and communicative hospitality of the Mirfield Fathers, especially of FF. G. W. Hart and Frere, to whom also I am indebted for the original of the photograph of Mirfield, facing p. 234.

To these I would add the names of Adeline Duchess of Bedford; Mrs. Warre Cornish; His Grace the Archbishop of Canterbury; Fr. H. M. M. Evans, of St. Joseph's, Brighton; Prior MacNabb, O.P.; Mgr. A. S. Barnes of Llandaff House; Viscount Halifax, in whose affection

Hugh Benson found so constant a support; and very many others whose correspondence or hospitality has been of so much help to me, especially as regards the earlier part of his life.

The Abbot of Caldey, the Rev. A. Morgan, the Rev. J. MacMahon, of New York; the Rev. R. Watt, Mrs. F. Kershaw, Miss E. K. Martin, Miss M. Armstrong, Miss Kyle, Miss Lyall, Mr. Richard Howden, Mr. G. J. Pippet,[1] Mr. B. Merefield, Mr. E. W. Hornung, and the many friends whose memories are fastened about Hare Street and his later years, have also been of the most patient and generous kindness. Especially I wish to thank the many who have trusted me with his letters, or written to me of the spiritual direction he gave them. Often their names will appear here but rarely, or not at all; perhaps because they have explicitly wished to remain anonymous, or because their contributions, which they may recognise, appear in a continuous context, not actually quoted; or simply because I felt, in many cases, that names were best omitted. Perhaps the most valuable help of any has come from these.

Certainly to no one of them can these pages appear anything but jejune and even false, at times. They will remember how hard a task it is to compress into any book *everything* they can know of so many-sided and many-mooded a man as was Hugh Benson: that much should not be said in any book; and that something there is of incommunicable which they each of them have received, and neither wish to nor can hand over to the eyes and criticism of another. Should any of these, then, feel that

[1] The two drawings of Hare Street Chapel are by Mr. Pippet; also the vignette of the Vernacle, or Volto Santo, upon the title-page. Its robust pathos and almost harsh simplicity are thoroughly in tone with the emotional preferences of Hugh Benson.

this presentment of Hugh, which has striven to be first objective and then interpretative, has suffered the perhaps uncapturable spirit to elude it, so that it becomes a parody rather than a portrait, I trust they will forgive me. In any case, they will accept my repeated thanks for their generosity and confidence.

C. C. M.

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PART I

NOVEMBER 18, 1871—SEPTEMBER 11, 1903

Nondum amabam, et amare amabam, quaerebam quid amarem, amans amare.

ST. AUGUSTINE, *Confessions.*

ROBERT HUGH BENSON

CHAPTER I

CHILDHOOD, 1871–1882

The river, on from mill to mill,
Flows past our childhood's garden still
Below the yew—it still is there—
Our phantom voices haunt the air
As we were still at play,
And I can hear them call and say:
"*How far is it to Babylon?*"
Ah, far enough, my dear,
Far, far enough from here—
Yet you have farther gone.

R. L. STEVENSON.

ROBERT HUGH BENSON was the son of a father "for whom" (his eldest son has written) "the day was never long enough," while "even at night he lived in fiery and fantastic dreams": his mother belonged to that brilliant Sidgwick clan in which Sir Francis Galton found "the most remarkable case of kindred aptitude that had ever come under his notice." Moreover, the Archbishop and his wife had in Christopher Benson a common ancestor, and were in fact second cousins. Thus, through this marriage, qualities remarkable enough in themselves were reinforced or duplicated, and issued, in the children of such parents, into that confraternity of talent which is known.[1]

[1] Or rather, not fully known perhaps to those who have not heard of the extraordinary and precocious intelligence and spirituality of Martin, the Archbishop's eldest son, who died while still at Winchester; or who have not read the subtle and fascinating studies of Miss Margaret Benson, his second daughter. Dare I say that she has seen even farther into "the soul of a cat" than did the author of *The Necromancers?*

The Bensons descend from a sound stock of Yorkshire yeomanry into which a strain of inventiveness and shrewd business qualities had of recent generations been infused. The Sidgwicks were rich mill-owners of Skipton; and Stonegappe, in the moors, and Skipton Castle, where they lived in the winter, gave Edward White Benson, who was born in 1829, visions of a social life wider than that which his own home afforded. Yet, strangely, that temperament of artist and aristocrat, which was to reveal itself as his, seems wholly uninherited. From the outset the boy was ardent, assimilative, and creative. He was given lesson-books; but the multitude of *other* books distracted him; he read them all and talked incessantly, being in restless need to expand and communicate himself. "Just let me read you this," he would exclaim; "it is only a little bit of Southey. I shall get it off my mind and really be able to work *then*." Then followed his views on literature in general. At this time he was about ten years old. He led, too, a mystical life of his own, and had an oratory with cross and prie-dieu and decorative brass-rubbings. Here he recited the Canonical Hours, alone or with boy friends, and devised traps for audacious sisters who might invade his privacy. At eleven he went to King Edward's Grammar School at Birmingham, and prospered intellectually, and felt the first stirrings of ambition, and made romantic friendships diversified by explosive quarrels, though certain notable affections survived for life—for Westcott and Lightfoot, for example; and here too he met Edward I. Purbrick,[1] a future Provincial of the Jesuits. At fourteen

[1] He visited Fr. Purbrick in 1872 at Stonyhurst. Each had prayed daily for the other, they discovered. Benson has left a sympathetic but inaccurate account of Fr. Purbrick's Mass, and dwells tenderly upon his friend's "wonderfully delicate, self-governed look" and his "quiet dignity of self-possession." Fr. Purbrick was indeed one of the world's few men who may be called imperial;

he is devouring the "Tracts for the Times," justifying himself by the thought that his father (who died in 1843) would have wished him to know "what was going on in the Church." Already indicated, by a judge of character, as "a born courtier," though too eager in manner, perhaps, to make that a really good description, he is none the less definitely touched by grace; he loves liturgy and church architecture, and has for ideal "to be a Canon and recite the Daily Offices in my Cathedral;" and he forms a small and secret "Society for Holy Living." Best of all, he is fired by his head-master, Mr. Prince Lee, afterwards Bishop of Manchester, with a passionate and personal devotion to our Lord.[1]

In 1848 he passes to Trinity College, Cambridge, where he practises rigid economy, eschews all recreation except bathing, forms gradually his always rather complex style, and allows his mind to pursue its favourite processes of curious observation and collection of detail. He founds a "Ghost Society," a forerunner of the "Psychical Society," and notes, sometimes at great length, those wild but most

his width of view was vast, his mastery of detail miraculous, and neither quality injured the other. He retained to the end his fresh youthfulness of soul, and his inner life was profoundly spiritual. Fr. Purbrick later on visited his old friend, then Archbishop, at Lambeth Palace.

[1] He reverenced Lee profoundly; and undoubtedly this saintly scholar did much to stimulate yet further Edward Benson's alert imagination in classical and ecclesiastical departments alike. His memory was vivid and comprehensive, but (for his artistic temperament betrayed him) inaccurate, and his historical knowledge was constructive, but subject to abrupt collapses. It is interesting to find that as a boy he met Catholicism in the person of Newman, preaching in his Oratory. The boy is spell-bound by his "Angel eloquence"; shudders at the "terrible lines" and "craft" seated on Newman's countenance—"Oh, Lightfoot, never you turn Romanist if you are to have a face like that!"—watches him singing the Litany of Loretto, and marks his relative apathy during the invocation of "most of the saints" (none of which exist in that Litany), and his impassioned fervour as he utters certain titles of our Lady, a number of which the young critic quotes, but no single one of them accurately, though proffering them as arguments against Madonna worship.

coherent dreams which were always to illuminate his nights. During this time his mother and a favourite sister died, and much responsibility descended on his shoulders. He went, in 1852, as assistant master to Rugby, where the Sidgwicks were installed, among them being the child on whom his tenacious affections had already fastened. His relations with his pupils, though he refused a House, were intimate: with bathing, his exercise now is to ride, and he will transmit, in part, his keen love of horses, and wholly his passion for the water, to his youngest son. He travels, and is presented to Pio Nono. The mystery of St. Peter's, for a moment, holds him spellbound. The Pope passed by, towards the Tomb: round the dome above it thundered the "awful legend" TU ES PETRUS: "one felt for a moment as if they really must be the historical chain that bound the earth to the shore of the Sea of Galilee, as if this were the mountain of the Lord's House exalted on the top of the hills." The impression passed. Elected Fellow of Trinity and ordained priest, he received from the Prince Consort, in 1858, the offer of the headmastership at the newly-created Wellington College. He accepted it, and entered upon his arduous task in 1859, having married Miss Mary Sidgwick the year before. She accompanied him to Wellington, a "sedate matron of eighteen," and all his life remained a strength and refreshment to her husband.

At Wellington he first revealed that astounding power of organisation, which survives in the mind of many, who knew him best in his work, as his predominant characteristic. Physically he was cast in an impressive mould: largeness and power marked all his action. The representatives of the Iron Duke's family felt disgust when

the moneys, subscribed *in memoriam*, which they had hoped to see spent upon "fine monuments" set up in "every considerable town" of England, were "lumped together" for the building of a "charity school for scrubby little orphans"; Dr. Benson made it, single-handed, into one of the first Public Schools of England. His masterfulness first expressed itself in the tremendous discipline he exacted: awe, not love, was what he at first provoked. He had no idea as yet of his "extreme personal ascendancy," or of how his displeasure or gloom could depress his entire environment. His anger still was terrible; his exactions at all times severe; he was an exhausting travelling companion, so would he tear the heart out of all he saw—and he saw everything—and expect an attention and appreciation no less vigorous from his tired family. One result of this high tension at which he lived and kept others, was a recurrent melancholy better described as "black fierce misery," a mood bound to alternate with his enthusiasm. "We laughed," writes the late Dr. A. W. Verrall, in a memoir of characteristic subtlety and insight, "at his rosy ideals, and his astounding power of believing and asserting that they were on the point of realisation, nay, actually were and had been realised. . . . He could not, I believe, give an *uncoloured* picture of any society in which he was vitally interested—that is to say, of any society whatever!" This passionate interest in life, this enthusiasm with its alternating mood, this constructive and reconstructive imagination, with its necessary divergences from the accurate, he was to transmit almost undiluted to his son Hugh. So too his unique appreciation and management of the spectacular, and his ingenious love of an art so recondite in detail as to border upon mystification. Every minutest point in the decoration of

Wellington College Chapel, in sculpture and glass, was planned by him and charged with "conceits" and subtleties which all but defy deciphering.

He planned the Master's Lodge, however, and its garden in 1865, at a moment when mid-Victorian scholastic architecture was uttering its loudest, if not its last, word in hideousness. We read of pitch-pine fittings and of light lilac washes; and we see walls of patterned brick, and stone-faced Gothic windows, and lakes of gravel, and chill evergreens.

Here Hugh was born on 18th November 1871, in the big room facing, on the one side, the south front of the College, on the other, looking over rolling heather, to Ambarrow with its ancient crowning firs.[2]

The christening took place at Sandhurst Parish Church. The baby was called Robert, a family name, and Hugh, having been born on the morrow of the feast of St. Hugh of Lincoln. During the ceremony he protested loudly and shocked his brothers. But there is no history to be made public about babies. . . . Robin, as he was at first called, succeeded at least in showing that he was "then, and always, perfectly clear what his wishes were, and equally clear that they were worth attending to and carrying out."

Dr. Benson was a prebendary of Lincoln, and his old friend Bishop Wordsworth made him Canon and Chancellor there in 1872. To Lincoln then the family migrated in that year. If, in the railway carriage, as he travelled down, the small boy insisted on spending the long journey at the window, "making remarks on everything,"

[1] In fact, when in 1892 he revisited Wellington, they all but defied his own.

[2] Dr. Benson was devoted to this view. "Who am I," he often exclaimed, "that I should be able to look at *that* every morning?"

one may not too fantastically surmise that the exquisite Lincoln Chancery sank deep into the accessible subconsciousness of this child. This was the house which remained his permanent ideal. Tudor red-brick, with oriel windows; oak doors studded with the bullets of the Commonwealth; panelling; winding stairs in drawing-rooms, "with pentacles on the steps to ward off devils"; a ghost unexorcised; a schoolroom once the chapel. Soon the windows glowed with coat-armoured glass: in a tiny oratory Morning Prayer and a simplified Compline will be recited, and, on Wednesday and Friday, a Litany translated from the Greek. An ancient garden spread between walls luscious with peach and apricot and ablaze with wallflower. Towers rose at its corners, part of the old town fortifications. In the grey city a vision of Castle and Cathedral floated, an eternal witness above "the streaming smoke of myriad chimneys."

Within this romantic paradise, where so easily just clerical decorum might have reigned, the Chancellor found himself busier even than at Wellington. At once he organises and indeed creates. A Theological College is opened; night schools for men and boys are started. The men pour roughly in; in a moment, the Chancellor has them in hand, sorted and obedient. He explains the Bible to them, and thinks "with a workman's mind." His influence is paramount in Lincoln; yet his thoughts range wide, to the colonies and the English Church as a whole, destined to be his master vision. Meanwhile he studies; he writes at *Cyprian;* undertakes the epistles to the Philippians and the Thessalonians for the Speaker's Commentary; lectures on Alfred the Great, studying up the subject *ab ovo;* he preaches his "residence" sermons, and is a "chief missioner" in a Lenten Mission, and to

the Chancellor's School he lectures thrice a week. "Can *I really do any* more?" he asks; and, though tempted, refuses the Hulsean professorship at Cambridge. He has been "perfectly happy in placing the Sweet Mother in her niche. . . . *Beata Maria Lincolniensis* is my patroness."

He refused, too, the offer of the bishopric of Calcutta, foreseeing that he could not provide in India for the religious education of his six children, which he felt to be the foremost charge entrusted to him. "*τέκνα ἔχειν πιστά* is a Pauline note of a Bishop," he wrote; and of him Canon Crowfoot said: "Nothing struck me so much as the intense reverence which, as a father, he felt for his children. He spoke sometimes with awe and trembling, lest his own strong will and that stubborn temper, with which his own life was one perpetual struggle, should do some wrong to them." And the outlook appalled him. "Religious education," he wrote in 1876 to Lightfoot, "is indeed a difficulty such as had no existence when we were lads. It is plain enough to see the difference between worldliness and ambition, but unbelief now wears a chasuble—I mean a vestment on which the *word* 'religion' is joyously worn. And unbelievers pretend that no one is religious except non-Christians."

At four or five, childhood's impressions can be exceptionally keen, if only because they omit so much: in an artistic temperament they will be numerous and rich, and lay up a multi-coloured treasure of memories. I have no sort of doubt but that Lincoln, with its ancient gardens and Tudor halls and the Cathedral towers dim above the smoke, was responsible for many of Hugh's imaginative tendencies. All his life he was to live in

a romantic environment, save quite at its beginning. Romance clings imperishably, I know, to every brick and stone of a big boys' school, but it must have fainted quickly upon the lilac walls and pitch pine of the Master's Lodge, and, anyhow, Hugh never got his really first impressions there.

Few tales survive from Lincoln. Is it childish, in a biographer, to find these few significant, or at least, in a sense, symbolical?

An old colleague of Dr. Benson's from Wellington came to the Chancery and presented Hugh with a Bible. After lunch, Hugh, pathetic in black velvet and haloed with flaxen hair brushed until it shone, appeared at the drawing-room door, Bible in his arms. "Tha-a-ank you, Godpapa, for this beautiful Bible! Will you read me some of it?" he asked, qualifying, one might have thought, for membership in the "Fairchild Family."[1] "And what," Mr. Penny asked, "shall I read about?" as Mrs. Benson, his companion in the drawing-room, retired awestruck. "The De-e-vil!" said Hugh without the slightest hesitation. Mrs. Benson returned.

He "cherished a tender devotion," as they say, "towards his glorious patron, St. Hugh of Lincoln," and, with a child's appropriativeness, recognised him in the most casual ornaments which might represent old men. That the emblematic swan was absent troubled him not at all. He merely inquired "what his Goose was doing?"[2]

Finally, this extremely imaginative and nervous boy

[1] Does anyone now remember this book, which made the terror and edification of Victorian generations?

[2] The Chancellor, who relates this, begins, "Hugh distinguished himself *as usual* . . ." Evidently at these luncheon parties with old friends, to which all the children went, Hugh could be trusted for some quaintness of remark. We regret that no compilation of these earlier *memorabilia* was made.

could never be induced to enter a dark room alone. "What," he was asked, "do you expect to happen to you?" "To fall," he replied between a stammer and a shudder, "over a mangled corpse, squish! into a pool of blood!"

Devils, saints, and horrors. Perhaps, in his life, these motifs, with others, will to the end not unequally be mingled.

A photograph of Hugh at this period survives. The attitude—the slightly forward, slightly slanted, intense set of the head—the eyes and the mouth, seem to me ridiculously like those of the older Hugh. The nose, of course, is unformed, and the head rounder and the hair finer. Beside him is his old nurse Beth, unduly austere, I imagine, in her heavy Victorian dress and cap, and with the shadows of the mouth over-accentuated by the photograph. But her eyes are wonderful, and their serene loving beauty tempers the sheer strength of the nose and chin.

The name of this beloved nurse will often recur in these pages. She belonged to the inmost of the family which she served from girlhood to extreme old age. She had been nursemaid to Mrs. Benson's mother, and nursed her brother, Mr. William Sidgwick, through an attack of smallpox, which she caught herself. She went with Mrs. Benson to Wellington, and Hugh was always her favourite child. He was not to prove ungrateful.

In 1876 the arrangements for carving a new diocese out of the unwieldy territory of Exeter were completed, and in the winter a Bishop was required for Truro. The charge was offered to the Chancellor of Lincoln.[1] He

[1] In his biography is quoted in full the characteristic and affectionate letter he wrote to Fr. Purbrick on this occasion.

reluctantly accepted it, fearing the tradition that Yorkshiremen and Cornishmen could never fuse; and in 1877 left Lincoln with a heavy heart.[1]

For Palace, the new Bishop acquired the Vicarage of a large parish, Kenwyn. At once his forceful hands remodelled it, building two wings, converting stables into kitchens, and kitchens into a chapel, and adding a library. So, too, his ingenious fancy rechristened it Lis Escop, Cornish for Bishop's Court. In this world of grim and granite scenery and soft air where camellias and hydrangeas luxuriated, romance raised once more her insistent crest. The Bishop's fancy played delightedly through these villages of mysterious and ancient saints' names—Ia, Carantoc, and Uny; and again, Halzephron, Lanteglos, Perranuthnoe, Perranzabuloe; and revelled in these venerable traditions and incredible anecdotes, as of the vicar's sister who read the lessons in the church, in a deep bass voice; of the nervous and fugitive curate, who had to be chained to the altar rails during service lest, at the responses, he should dart from the church—the churchwarden holding the padlock-key. The Bishop expanded and inhaled a new air of enthusiasm and "unconventional holiness"—he gained, as they say, the "accent of holiness," and was recognised by the Cornish as a "converted man." But with this picturesque piety and curious research into antiquity and local lore went always the passion for construction—purely ecclesiastical

[1] "Is this Truro?" Hugh exclaimed at the first station where the train stopped after Lincoln. But I gather he forthwith succumbed to that train sickness which for years was to harass him. Once his mother took him abroad. The crossing was painful: in the train he refused lunch, saying that the very mention of food made him feel sick. "Sit at the far end of the carriage and shut your eyes," his mother said, "while I eat mine:" no; the very sound of crumpled paper made him feel ill: then, the bare idea that there was food in the carriage. . . . His mother had to disembark at the first stop and bolt her food on the platform.

construction, it is emphasized, uninterrupted by social claims or politics. "The one lesson," he declared at the first Truro Diocesan Conference, "which sentiment teaches us is to be practical; and the voice of the past is, 'Organise the present.'" He had especially to face the "rousing" of his people "into tranquillity." The Church was indifferent; the local religion passed from a drugged apathy into a frenzy of revivals followed by pathological reactions. The Bishop studied, sympathised, conquered hearts, developed a human influence nothing short of extraordinary. "Cornwall," he used to say, "was the only place where a conversation with any man, woman, or child whom you might meet, in the loneliest corners of the promontory, was always stimulating, never disappointing." He still paid for his hours of fire and exaltation by moods of black depression; and the death of his eldest and most brilliant son, Martin, at Winchester, in 1878, utterly prostrated him.

Meanwhile his children's education proceeded, and I shall be forgiven if I quote more pages than one from Mr. A. C. Benson's *Hugh*. I can add little to them, and their affectionate humour would be lost in condensation.

"At Truro he becomes a much more definite figure in my recollections. He was a delicately made, light-haired, blue-eyed child, looking rather angelic in a velvet suit, and with small, neat feet, of which he was supposed to be unduly aware. He had at that time all sorts of odd tricks, winkings and twitchings; and one very aggravating habit, in walking, of putting his feet together suddenly, stopping and looking down at them, while he muttered to himself the mystic formula, 'Knuck, Nunks.'[1] But one thing about him was very distinct indeed, that he was entirely impervious to the

[1] When at Eton he had a habit of walking with a certain shuffle, for which he acutely disliked being criticised.

public opinion of the nursery, and could neither be ridiculed nor cajoled out of continuing to do anything he chose to do. He did not care the least what was said, nor had he any morbid fears, as I certainly had as a child, of being disliked or mocked at. He went his own way, knew what he wanted to do, and did it.

"My recollections of him are mainly of his extreme love of argument and the adroitness with which he conducted it. He did not intend to be put upon as the youngest, and it was supposed that if he was ever told to do anything, he always replied: 'Why shouldn't Fred?' He invented an ingenious device which he once, and once only, practised with success, of goading my brother Fred by petty shafts of domestic insult into pursuing him, bent on vengeance. Hugh had prepared some small pieces of folded paper with a view to this contingency, and as Fred gave chase, Hugh flung two of his papers on the ground, being sure that Fred would stop to examine them. The ruse was quite successful, and while Fred was opening the papers, Hugh sought sanctuary in the nursery. Sometimes my sisters were deputed to do a lesson with him. My elder sister Nelly had a motherly instinct, and enjoyed a small responsibility. She would explain a rule of arithmetic to Hugh. He would assume an expression of despair: 'I don't understand a word of it—you go so quick.' Then it would be explained again: 'Now do you understand?' 'Of course I understand *that*.' 'Very well, do a sum.' The sum would begin: 'Oh don't push me—don't come so near—I don't like having my face blown on.' Presently my sister with angelic patience would show him a mistake. 'Oh, don't interfere—you make it all mixed up in my head.' Then he would be let alone for a little. Then he would put the slate down with an expression of despair and resignation; if my sister took no notice he would say: 'I thought Mamma told you to help me in my sums? How can I understand without having it explained to me?' It was impossible to get the last word; indeed he used to give my sister Maggie when she taught him what he called 'Temper tickets,' at the end of the lesson; and on one occasion, when he was to repeat a Sunday collect to her, he was at last reported to my mother, as being wholly intractable. This was deeply resented;

and after my sister had gone to bed, a small piece of paper was pushed in beneath her door, on which was written: 'The most unhappiest Sunday I ever spent in my life. Whose fault?'

"Again, when Maggie had found him extremely cross and tiresome one morning in the lessons she was taking, she discovered, when Hugh at last escaped, a piece of paper on the schoolroom table, on which he had written:

"'Passionate Magey
Toodle Ha! Ha!
The old gose.'[1]

"There was another story of how he was asked to write out a list of the things he wanted, with a view to a birthday that was coming. The list ended:

"'A little compenshion goat, and
A tiny-winy train, and
A nice little pen.'

"The diminutives were evidently intended to give the requirements a modest air. As for 'compenshion,' he had asked what some nursery animal was made of, a fracture having displayed a sort of tough fibrous plaster. He was told that it was made of 'a composition.'

"We used to play many rhyming games at that time; and Hugh at the age of eight wrote a poem about a swarm of gnats dancing in the sun, which ended:

"'And when they see their comrades laid
In thousands round the garden glade,
They know they were not really made
To live for evermore.'

In one of these games, each player wrote a question which was to be answered by some other player in a poem; Hugh, who had been talked to about the necessity of overcoming some besetting sin in Lent, wrote with perfect good faith as his question, 'What is your sin for Lent?'"

[1] Was this retaliation? On an old sheet of paper I find the anxious query: "Am I a gose?" then more boldly, "If I am a gose I'm very silly, and then I shall not be like a lily . . ."; finally in triumph, "I'm not a goose . . . which sets out in the rain which has a great pane when it is being killed."

Besides these more orthodox diversions, it is satisfactory to know that the brothers and sisters, true to the immemorial instinct which tempts children, and simple persons generally, towards secrecy and intrigue, had formed a mysterious society with "titles, and offices, and ceremonies": its Chapters were held in a summer house, and there were "robes and initiations and a book of procedure." Hugh was Servitor—a kind of acolyte, and subscriptions had to be paid, out of which wholly inadequate salaries were refunded. To the end Hugh delighted "to talk of the society," though, equally to the end, it remained unknown for what possible object the society had existed.[1]

But his boyhood was not spent in aloofness from his father. It is true that his mother for the most part taught him, or his elder sister; but the Bishop used to take him for lessons half an hour a day; a beginning was made of that pathetic effort to win the boy's full comradeship by "spudding expeditions," on which Hugh, armed with a little spud modelled on his father's, worked at the dandelions on the lawn. Another office, linking father and son together, became permanent, and was dear to the heart of both of them. When Archbishop Tait was to come to lay the foundation-stone of Truro Cathedral, Hugh, as acolyte, in purple cassock and cap and surplice, was to bear his train. The Archbishop could not come, so Hugh attended his father, and afterwards, with a special mallet and trowel made for him, laid a

[1] Neither then nor ever, his brother adds, was he embarrassed by inconvenient shyness. Personages were to mean little enough to him. The member for Truro, Sir James MacGarel Hogg, formal, dignified, and white-bearded, was lunching at Lis Escop, and escorted Hugh's mother to the dining-room. Secreted there beforehand, Hugh burst out upon the procession with a wild howl, creating consternation.

stone in the rising walls. At his father's enthronement at Canterbury he performed the same duty. "I looked perfectly charming," he said of himself later, "in a little p-purple cassock and a little p-purple c-cap." [1]

On Hugh's tenth birthday, November 18th, 1881, the private chapel at Lis Escop was opened. The Bishop wrote to his daughter Mary Eleanor:

TRURO, *November 18th*, 1881.

MY DEAREST LOVE AND DAUGHTER,—I won't go to bed when you have seemed to be with us so much all day without telling you what a delightful opening of the chapel we have had on Hugh's birthday.

He was so anxious to keep it in that manner that we postponed it; and the chapel, after all, would not have been ready if we had not. . . .

Mama will send you a programme. First we prayed, yet asked for forgiveness and help in what we were about to do. Then I signed the licence, and Mr. Dickinson read it aloud. Then, it being by law allowed for the purpose, we had full choral Evening Prayer. After that we dedicated the Altar and all its appointments, Hugh bringing them one by one from the credence and looking so reverent and simple in his purple cassock and ephod like Samuel. And then I spoke to them all about the "Decency and order" of the Church of England. Then prayers for Hugh and for us all.

This cultivated piety might make us nervous for the fate of its subject. Even his more directly educational experiences, even his recreations, would (until one knows Hugh's character, and indeed his father's, better) not tend to reassure us. The entire family will go for walks; botanising proceeds; Hugh returns asserting that when-

[1] This stimulated a taste. The Rev. W. H. G. Jones, to whom he made this avowal, found him one day in his undergraduate's rooms at Cambridge with a pile of Japanese garments on the floor. His visitor asked him if he had been performing to an audience. "No," he answered; "I have just been dressing up." And on a much more important occasion he wrote: "Monsignor? the title isn't worth much; but the clothes are gorgeous. Peacocks aren't in it."

ever he goes out with the rest he is made to talk about nothing but poetry and civilisation.

He could enjoy his walks, however. Cornish scenery is provocative in its varying beauty. His father writes in his diary of September 2nd, 1882, how he with his children climbed Roughtor in violent weather:

Tintagel, mystical through rainy films—distant valleys palely discernible.

And again on September 13th:

One of the most delightful days of my life—by earliest train to Penzance, breakfasted there, drove to Logan Rock, to top of which all climbed. Then walked with them by Tol Pedn Penwith to Land's End. The beauty and glory of rock, sea, sky, and air, and the dear enjoyment of these earnest children—as joyous as they are good—Fred's splendid dash up and down the rocks after a Clouded Yellow which he secured, and Hugh's endless similes for every effect.[1] The peaceful penetrating delight of Maggie, and Nellie's capital sketching. The climax came sitting on Land's End itself, eating pounds of great grapes. Home by the latest train. All most delightful, and yet——

Quite apart from the "ticketing" tendency this diary displays (each member of the party was expected to play up to his special character), which in Hugh was quite as strong as, and perhaps more precipitate than in his father, it appears to me to involve an element of very poignant pathos, and to reveal a divergence not alone in mode of emotional expression, but in temperamental construction which might well have foreshadowed a more profound cleavage of sympathy than was ever, in fact, destined to come about, between the Bishop and his children. Having said this, and in view of all I am

[1] His gift of unexpected simile remained unaltered. "May's feelings towards Val went in moods, like layers in a Neapolitan ice" is the sort of thing he constantly said, and at a moment's notice.

about to suggest, I wish first to emphasize that whatever else may or may not be true, this at any rate is most utterly certain, that this father's love for his children was not only profound, but passionate, and that he singled out Hugh as the one on whom he was fain to lavish all that was most tender and most intimate in that love. "I always reckoned on this one," he was to write later, when Hugh decided in 1889 to go in for the Indian Civil Service, "to be my great friend as I grew old." That anything should be written or surmised which might obscure this primary fact of Bishop Benson's affection for his children, and perhaps for Hugh in particular, would be a grief to all who love or revere, on different titles, his memory, and to it, before all further considerations, homage must be rendered. Later, I hope to recur to, and insist upon this ever more tender and mellowed love.

But it was an anxious love: Mr. A. C. Benson speaks of his father's "almost tremulous sense of parental responsibility." Here was a man combining the rare qualities of power and of sensitiveness, of the autocrat, and the artist, the doer and the dreamer. Great politicians often achieve their triumphs by shutting off—even at the seeming expense of justice and truth—every aspect of a question except one, and then concentrating continuously the whole force of their personality upon the realisation of that which they so one-sidedly behold. A many-sided view often paralyses action. Now for force of personality Hugh's father was perhaps not easily outpassed. Whatever he did—and his hand found many things to do—he did it with his might. Largely built, as I have said, "leonine," as they call it, in mould of head and firm of tread, he carried himself throughout life finely, with

μεγαλοπρέπεια, as Aristotle determines it, an undoubted aristocrat, utterly a prelate, though the gentleness of his dignity increased to the end. However, he could also, like an artist, focus and refocus perspectives with extraordinary rapidity and completeness. Accordingly, when the scenery of his attention altered abruptly from Europe, or England, or his diocese, to a vicarage or a schoolroom, and the same torrential flow of personal judgment, enterprise, and handling kept on its way, its subjects came easily enough to feel themselves its victims. Moreover, he viewed all things, spontaneously, *sub specie aeternitatis*. At times, then, he behaved like Browning's Lazarus, who, having seen the glory to this side and to that of life's black thread, acted "across," and not "along," the thread. In trifles at times he would catch "prodigious imports, whole results." Although, I confess, the sickening of his loved child to death "abated" terribly his cheerfulness, and caused him much "pretermission of the daily craft," yet it was true enough of him that "a word, a gesture, a glance from that same child

> "Will startle him to an agony of fear,
> Exasperation, just as like."

He brooded; he ordered the might of his remonstrance by his changing mood indeed, but also by his uneclipsed ideal; he appealed to lofty motives to which onlookers could see quite well the children were at the moment, or perhaps always, incapable of responding.

With regard to Hugh in particular this was unfortunate. To him he had transmitted, generously, the artist's temperament and all the vividness of his personality. Hugh then too had a personality and was irrevocably an individualist. But where the Bishop

advanced terrible as an army with banners, Hugh skirmished; what the Bishop meant to do, he prepared elaborately and then *did*. Hugh, fired by an idea, rushed at the materialising it, quite without the previous mastery of the means to this.[1]

The Bishop was in all that he did relentlessly purposeful; nothing in Lis Escop just "happened." He tended, as I said, to exhaust his family, who might be excused for wanting a little room just to "play about in," a prerogative which Mr. E. F. Benson so generously allows to his characters. Hugh Benson, even when at last he learnt to work, did so in fierce bursts of concentrated energy which left him sometimes exhausted, but often in a delightfully inconsequent humour, in which conversation bubbled out pell-mell, and the ideal, on the whole, was that you should for the moment pursue no ideal save, if you will, that of complete relaxation. His father never could relax. Even such dissipations which were officially organised were not always, as I suggested, of the most exhilarating. The Bishop expected that his children should enjoy themselves intelligently, and was worried by the flippant and volatile. He liked being asked sensible questions, to be suitably answered. Once

[1] A charming anecdote relates how, fascinated by the idea of conjuring, he at once offered to give an exhibition, but he had practised none of his tricks, and the result was a fiasco. Similarly he prepared a marionette show at Addington, where puppets dressed by Beth and his sisters were to enact scenes from history, as, for instance, from the life of Thomas à Becket. The curtain rose: Hugh's voice was heard declaring: "Scene, an a-arid waste," and next, in a loud, agitated whisper, "Where is the Archbishop?" But the puppet had been lost, and from this play of Becket the Archbishop had to be omitted. An invitation and a ticket to the Bonus Theatre, "owned by" R. H. Benson, still survives. Admission is free, children half-price. The play, by M. E. Benson, is *The Ghost of Castle Garleigh*. The villain is Don Jacopo, uncle of the maiden Andromache, who inherits Castle Garleigh. Her brothers are named Baldwin and Pedro; Camilla is an old hag, accomplice of Jacopo; the ghost is her father Ramon, supposed dead, but returning in the nick of time to prevent her murder.

on a Sunday walk he had been explaining the Parable of the Good Samaritan to Hugh, and then seeing an old woman toiling uphill with a bag of potatoes, "Go," said he to Hugh, "and be a Good Samaritan to that old lady." "But, papa," answered Hugh, playing up like any Sandford, "I ought to hate her as the Samaritans hated the Jews." This gave the Bishop his chance of redeeming the character of the priesthood; but his effort to help the old woman was anticipated by "a still more active Levite" in the person of the curate of Kenwyn, who had caught him up. . . . These Sunday walks are mentioned by Hugh Benson in his *Confessions* with no affectionate emphasis. They lasted an hour and a half, and were rather slow and "recollected." One of the children, or the Bishop, would read aloud, sometimes George Herbert, whose "peculiar, scholarly, and ingenious meditations" used, Hugh says, to produce in him "occasionally a sudden thrill of pleasure, but far more commonly a kind of despairing impatience." But he found satisfaction in the quaint devices such as wings or altars, in which Herbert printed his conceits.[1]

Lives of Saints, felt to be interminable; volumes of Church History; Dean Stanley on the Holy Land, were also read. St. Perpetua's martyrdom, indeed, captivated him, and he was awestruck and probably rather depressed to find that his father had been translating freely and at sight the certainly not too limpid Latin of her *Acta*. Children often feel resentful at the display of their parents'

[1] But George Herbert deserved better than this. His poetry is amply capable of appealing to childhood; and Hugh's taste for ingenuity ought, one would have thought, to have opened for him the gates to Herbert's more inward charm. Possibly the circumstances of his introduction to the poems spoilt (as happens in the case of so many authors read as, for instance, class work at school) his power of enjoying the poems themselves.

accomplishments, not to mention their virtues. It is so often implied that if they try hard they will be as good, one day, themselves. . . .

After the walk came the Greek Testament lesson or Bible-reading in the study. Hugh recalls the brilliancy and intellectuality of these functions, but in reality the children were, here again, not only rather bored, but distracted by the duty of seeking for their father's display of emphatic pleasure when they did well, and of avoiding his "oppressive disappointment" when they were stupid. Hugh had needed, he felt afterwards, a different machinery for the shaping of his spiritual life—a great use of pictures, a minute and constant ritual of fingered beads and crosses traced—still perhaps not realising the unique halo which can form itself around the written word of the Gospel if but the associated memories of its first reading be intimate and tender. But I must well confess that the Bishop, whose knowledge was exhaustive, had no notion how to "leave out." He had the scholar's horror of ragged edges, or of contents unexplained. The quaint wanderings of a word-stem through devious paths of meaning; the subtle values of tenses and particles; notions allied to the word but in no way to the context—who does not know the fascination which these have for certain minds, and indeed the curious delight and enrichment of view which may be found in yielding to the spell? But this better suits men standing, shall we say, for scholarships at a University, than the impatient mind of a Hugh, superficial in the sense that it might have enjoyed the vivid pictures thrown off by a passage taken as a whole, but by no means inclined to burrow among roots. Another time he said he felt like a little china mug being filled from a waterfall.

There are some rather hard pages in the *Confessions* in which Hugh seeks to describe the religious influence which his father exercised on his mind. It was so great, he asserts, that he despairs of describing it. He would have felt it a "kind of blasphemy," he says, to have held other opinions than his father's during his lifetime. I sincerely believe this to be a slightly inaccurate description of his own boy-mind. Certainly, records show that long before the Archbishop's death, Hugh's mind was working quite independently, to an extent, indeed, which made the Archbishop nervous. Moreover, much that was supremely meaningful to the Bishop—the Presence of God and its character, the personality of Jesus Christ—was not apprehended at all, or quite differently, by Hugh. I think it is true to say that for Hugh to have *stated*, even to himself, views differing from his father's, would have seemed "a kind of blasphemy." It is the hardest thing in the world to be quite sure of what one's real self does believe; and to a child the expression of a belief is constantly taken for the vital fact itself. Sometimes one comes across in a child, at a moment of spiritual unveiling of which it may itself be quite unconscious, the most startling exhibitions of interior scepticism; oftener still, of active self-delusion. Hugh relates a list of "puzzles" with which his father's beliefs supplied him—what really he thought about the binding character of the liturgy; of divorce; of the "Catholic Church," especially of the Sacrament of Penance. All these are, as conscious problems, undoubtedly the products of a later age, and not to be reflected back to the simpler days of Truro.

I think he speaks truly, though, when he says he felt towards God as towards a present parental authority, and that in it only the more austere elements of human

parenthood were to be perceived. It takes long to realise that it is after the heavenly fatherhood that "all paternity on earth is named" in pale and partial imagery, and it may well be that even as a rule God is, by obedient children, so cast in their human father's image, that He is not only none too well loved, nor even perhaps "liked," but on the whole resented though obeyed. The Person, too, of Jesus Christ, is, though I fancy less by Catholics than by those who do not possess the tabernacled Presence, conceived, as Benson says, in the past or the future, as the figure whom the Gospels show, tender and miracle-working, a world away in time and place, the Galilean who yet is to "come again." Sunday evenings, Benson has hinted in *The Light Invisible*, were touched for him with that glamour which I imagine almost the least wise of Victorian homes (and the Bensons' was far from being one of these) knew how to cast about them. Hymns, and the bells of Evensong, and a certain patriarchal tenderness, and a mysterious melancholy as of ending (for no one ever yet, I am sure, felt Sunday to be the first day of the week; it is an interspace, at best; clearly the new period starts on Monday morning), go to invest those hours with an unforgettable sentiment. Also Hugh recognised that a "strange aroma" cleaved about his memories of the careful liturgies performed in the tiny chapel of Lis Escop no less than in the stately oratories of Lambeth and of Addington. What I think is very characteristic indeed of Victorian and Anglican education, is a sort of Stoic equalisation of moral faults under the superior "formality" of "disobedience." It is recognised by parents, no doubt, that to climb over wire railings with one's feet elsewhere than close to the fixed supports, may damage indeed the wires, but is not morally wrong.

But to do so after being told not to, exalts the offence into a sin comparable to those of sulks, temper, or meanness. Possibly the parent may not guess that so the child-conscience feels the thing; but there is no sort of doubt that moral issues are thus quite often and quite gravely and for a long period confused, and a false conscience formed. Moral lapse, in the circumscribed sense, is reckoned inconceivable and as "not so much as to be mentioned among you"; it is never, therefore, alluded to, and never (alas, how fatally!) prepared for. Certain sins are outstandingly abhorrent; lying, thieving, and the improbable vice of cruelty. But it was difficult to see what expression of wrath would be found adequate for these when "to forget an order, or to disregard it in a moment of blinding excitement" (a characteristic condition, by the way), to throw stones at gold-fish or to play with fingers during prayers provoked all the reprobation due to grave moral delinquencies.[1]

It remains that Hugh had plenty of personality for resistance.

The most remarkable thing about him was a real independence of character, with an entire disregard of other people's opinion. What he liked, what he felt, what he decided, was the important thing to him, and so long as he could get his way, I do not think that he troubled his head about what other people might think or wish; he did not want to earn good opinions, nor did he care for disapproval or approval; people, in fact, were to him at that time just more or less favourable

[1] Benson says he was conscious of, and consoled himself by, this fact when once at Eton he was falsely accused of serious bullying and nearly flogged. "I was very nearly paralysed in mind," he says, "by the appalling atmosphere of my father's indignation, and wholly failed to defend myself by tears of silent despair." Almost so confused as to doubt his own innocence, he felt that he had at any rate known the worst of possible anger before, and for trivial faults.—*Confessions*, p. 15.

channels for him to follow his own designs, more or less stubborn obstacles to his attaining his wishes. He was not at all a sensitive or shrinking child. He was quite capable of holding his own, full of spirit and fearless, though quiet enough, and not in the least interfering, except when his rights were menaced.[1]

To sum up this part of the boy's life, spent altogether at home and apart from all alien influences. He appears to me already in a sense lonely, not that he was aloof, uninterested, eremitical, but rather that he was too interested, too keenly alert to new impressions, too excited over life, to be able to take in deep feelings—he was the most unsentimental of children—or at any rate to be conscious of his deeper feelings. Mr. A. C. Benson remarks more than once and with very great acuteness, in his father's Biography, that the Archbishop, to his reading of him, was not often conscious of the great happiness which in reality was his. He was too busy, too preoccupied, too ready for the next thing. Something of this already shows in Hugh. He really was happy at Truro, though from the *Confessions* you would never guess it. But partly he really had not anything very deep, as yet, within him (and, after all, he was barely eleven!) and partly he did not know what he in fact possessed (and again, at eleven one should not be too interiorly aware!). But one may regret that he did not feel more consciously his father's love for him, or, feeling it, could not find more that appealed to him in its expression. Earnestly I wish to repeat that here is no radical and total schism of temperaments such as is described in that most terrible book, *Father and Son*. The tragedy was subtler, as Hegel saw Greek tragedy to be. On either side was so much

[1] *Hugh*, p. 37.

good; on either, such a little that was faulty! Yet, for that, the two wills scraped along, if I dare put it so, side by side, not merely separate, still less springing vehemently apart, but never quite fusing; perhaps to the end a misunderstanding survived between two who should have been such friends.

And in all this long period of formation, there is one influence which in these pages of the *Confessions*, for whose seeming hardness we cannot but feel sorry, Hugh never mentions. Yet it was one which, his whole life through, kept revealing itself in its results. This was his mother's; and already, whether he knew it or not, a force was dealing with him, as vivid and active as the Bishop's, though more tacit, less to be appraised or minutely traced in detail. Her presence was to him both comfort and consolation—it meant less loneliness and more strength, it established his individuality, and led him beyond the limits of a selfish self. "Love best is served by briefest speech." So, if I allude no more explicitly to this constant factor in Hugh's life, its existence should never for a moment be forgotten, nor yet Hugh's ever-increasing recognition of its existence.

These two heredities and educations, then, formed Hugh's first years, and I have seemed to find Hugh hitherto in his father rather than to trace, later on, his father in Hugh. For whatever of fire and artistic versatility, of impatience with the data of mere sense, of constructive appetite reproduced itself in the son, the mould was indisputably broken; the vastness of mental grasp, the massiveness of execution, were not handed down; and if, as seems tolerably visible, the conspiring qualities of these two reunited clans reached to their most brilliant in the generation of which Hugh was the youngest, they

were destined, perhaps, to end there, so that in him precisely the prerogative of genius was most markedly allied, as so often, with a certain basic weakness; rapidity, with a certain impermanence; and delicacy of perception with a nervous system from the outset too high-strung.

CHAPTER II

AT CLEVEDON AND ETON, 1882–1889

"I had made up my mind that it was not pleasant to be an Ishmael, that as far as possible I would try to be an ordinary boy at my new school. . . ." "But don't be miserable" (he said) "just because you're different. I'm different; it's a jolly good thing to be different!"—RICHARD MIDDLETON.

IN the May of 1882 Hugh left home for the first time, and since it was very soon after this that his father was elected to be Archbishop of Canterbury, by Hugh's home will be meant, henceforward, Lambeth Palace and Addington Park near Croydon. The red-brick or white-stone turrets of Lambeth are familiar from the outside to those few Londoners who care to notice anything on the Surrey side of the Thames. It was never felt by the Archbishop's family really to be their home, and appears but seldom, even as background, in Hugh's novels. Addington was different, though now it has been sold, and the Archbishops no more live there. Its park is as beautiful as the house itself was unromantic, having that sober stateliness in which our nearer ancestors loved to encase rooms of extreme and substantial comfort. This place, with the riding which its park made continuously possible, often finds its way into Hugh's books;[1] above all, the stateliness of life in these houses, the cumbrous transportations of the family from one to another, the heterogeneous but

[1] The Archbishop rode slowly, and the horses became rather out of hand. By the boys, to be his companion in this was felt to be, perhaps, a penance, and shirked. One horse, in particular, Quentin, threw nearly everyone, Hugh included, and reappears in his own name, in a significant episode of *The Coward*.

always important gatherings which they inevitably collected, filled his memory with innumerable details for his imagination to work upon and his caustic wit to play with.

About his preparatory school at Walton House, Clevedon, in Somerset, he has very little to say. In his *Confessions* he mentions, of course, only his recollections of what had touched his religious sense, and these are connected merely with the moderately high ritual in vogue there, with a dark sanctuary, fenced off by iron and brass screen-work, with coloured stoles and depressing Gregorian chants. As a matter of fact, be the Sanctuary but dark enough and the screen tolerably glittering, the average small boy will remain complacently ignorant of what goes on inside the one and behind the other. He is content to sing the hymns he likes, to scratch his initials on the bench or to lick its varnish. Such religious emotions as reach him have to associate themselves somehow with the notion of home; they will be entirely unawakened at both early and mid-morning services, for in that bleak or brisk or rain-sodden atmosphere nothing of psychic stirs. Breakfast, anyhow, extinguishes such flickers of the soul as may respond to the thrilling light of dawn. But in the evening, the chapel is warm and dusky; the stained-glass light is solemn, and points of gas-flame make a glamour where brass or polished stone reflect them; favourite hymns, and the august and familiar phrasing of the Bible, relax interior resistance; the sermon, even, may disengage some sentiment. Vague resolutions form; promises are distantly recalled. Afterwards, the study of Greek Testament, supper, and the dismal prospect of Monday repress once more these spiritual stirrings.

Mr. A. Bevil Browne, who was a new boy at Walton House with Benson, recalls distinctly Hugh's pale face and longish hair and unusually thoughtful face.[1]

Certainly his dramatic imagination was already active. The boys used to be encouraged to learn Latin grammar at meal-times, and it is consoling to hear that this dyspeptic proceeding was alleviated by the stories into which Hugh used to fit the nouns occurring in the rhymes by means of which the boys learnt Latin genders. He was too brilliant; the laughter became uproarious, and the table was "silenced." Marionette plays became popular, though I do not find that it was Hugh who invented them. He and Lord Beauchamp dramatised Scott's *Abbot*, in which the escape from Lochleven had fired Hugh's imagination. Mr. Browne protested that the sentence, "One, two, three, four chairs, including the broken one," had not been rendered into verse. Hugh displayed the obstinacy suited to a poet who is sure of, but cannot justify, his intuitions. He just said that he had left it as it was in the book, and would not budge. So, to a protest that "the sky," which he was painting for the night-escape scenery, "isn't blue like that at night," he merely replied, "Oh, isn't it?" and proceeded.

Mr. Bevil Browne remembers him as not altogether happy in his environment, though he had the power of escaping from it by the doors his imagination opened, and he never showed "impatience of routine." As a matter of fact, his inventiveness was concrete: he started

[1] In the photograph of the three brothers published in *Hugh* it is seen that the long hair was no speciality of the youngest. Hugh wears the somewhat stunned expression proper to photographs, and is dressed in an Eton suit, not the "black suit with knickerbockers gathered at the knee, then as unusual as they are now universal," as Mr. Bevil Browne describes them.

fashions or feverishly adopted those existing and developed them. He liked teaching others to do what he could do—walking on stilts, for instance; was a bowler, and nearly in the eleven, and coached his dormitory for matches which he arranged.[1] Boy-like, he knew no half-tones: people were "beasts" or heroes. The reverential faculty showed no further sign of development. At Addington, in the holidays, Hugh once sat with his friend in a cedar and told stories and looked stealthily down on the heads of a dozen gathered Bishops and invented a nickname for each.

Mr. A. C. Benson would, I imagine, consider the colours of this picture too gay, if not idealised quite by reminiscence. "Hugh often spoke of Clevedon," he writes to me, "and always in a depressed sort of way." The town itself was—then, at any rate—sordid, modern, and straggling; Wales rose "shadowy across the mud-stained tide." Hugh disliked the view, and failed really to fit in with the life of a private school, a place where, more than in any other, the individualist is bound to pay. If, indeed, Hugh's memories of Clevedon were substantially unpleasant, I expect that he really was none too happy there. At the time, he may quite well not have known this. A small boy has an extraordinary power of not knowing whether he is liking his life as a whole or not. He can pass, at a hint, from gloom to excited pleasure; it takes long before a summing up is possible, and by that time developing personality has grievously altered the lenses of the mind. But, on the whole, while the memory tends to omit the unpleasant

[1] He is said to have invented a "tutorial system for his class, in which the top boys were to help the backward." But assuredly the practice of exacting toll from the superior expert is old enough, and did not require inventing by Hugh.

and to decorate the past with aureoles, Clevedon apparently never in his eyes wore a halo. In 1885 he won a scholarship at Eton and went there in September.

A boy's life at a Public School finds many more to speak of it than his earlier days at some Temple Grove or Elstree; perhaps, because the mind of a small boy is so hidden a thing and so hugely remote from middle-aged novelists, so inarticulate, and so devoid of the significant moods of adolescence that it is left alone. And yet Mr. Kenneth Grahame has briefly but sufficiently reminded the readers of *The Golden Age* that it is during the first term spent at a private school that the real gulf is cleft between the home-bred child and the boy. A few brave writers have invaded that twilit consciousness—Mr. Richard Middleton, for instance, in one or two subtle studies in *The Ghost Ship*,[1] but unsurpassably, of course, Mr. Compton Mackenzie in the first volume of *Sinister Street*. But there would be no materials, as has been seen, even for such architects as these, to construct a history of Hugh's mind during that fascinating period. Eton, no doubt, has fired fewer to write of her than has her more sentimental sister, Harrow; probably it is part of the unconscious ideal of the serene College to feel no need to speak about herself. Yet, it is not Eton, but still Hugh Benson himself who here defeats us. Eton never seems to have inspired him much. He never, for instance, uses his school as the setting of a novel, "historical" or modern. For a late Reformation story, the red-brick College and Henry's grey chapel, the old town, and the castle would have made an incomparable scene; and the man who could write so lightly and

[1] Thus, in *A Drama of Youth* and *The New Boy*.

suggestively, quite *en passant*, about a boy still at Eton, as Benson has in *The Coward*, could have written delicious things as a study of more youthful "Conventionalists" in that life of river and cricket-field and schoolroom and, above all, of House etiquette and hierarchy. He loved to diagnose the moods of boyhood and the gusty temper of adolescence. The solemnity of youth, masking its timidity; the charm—almost the sacredness—of cruelly-named "calf-loves;" the elusive religion and the rigid code of public opinion, were favourite topics for his thought. Yet of the life of Eton he says scarcely anything—a few hard pages in the *Confessions*, and three contemptuous articles in *Everyman*[1]—and of the place itself, never a word. When, in 1906, Mrs. Warre Cornish, the wife of the Vice-Provost of Eton, implored him to take Tudor Eton for a theme, he could not rouse himself to the slightest response. I frankly believe him to have lived in Eton, on the whole, impervious to the spirit of the place, and if this is so, no possible proof could be more cogent of the triple oak and bronze which his personality opposed to all that did not suit it. The same friend reminds me how all his life you might perceive in him a genuine temperamental detachment from one part of the impressive, court-like existence of Lambeth and even Addington, where the atmosphere was heavy with ecclesiastical and even secular politics, and, indeed, a certain sense of *sovereignty*; and similarly from Eton, where a code not in the least his own in so many points imposed itself upon him, he lived half out of sympathy. However, Mr. Matthew Hill, a contemporary of Hugh at Eton, in

[1] These articles created grave annoyance, and elicited protests by no means wholly playful when his name necessarily came up for invitation to the annual dinner of Catholic Old Etonians.

order to correct any impression of deliberate aloofness on Hugh's part, has written:

When we were boys together he was by no means regardless or unheeding of public opinion. On the contrary, he was exceptionally anxious not to offend the conventional standards, or at any rate not to be found out doing so. He was always careful to know the right people and do the right thing. His individuality of character had not in those days asserted itself. Although much is vague in my own mind as to what happened nearly thirty years ago, these impressions stand out clearly enough, and I am convinced of the truth of the above.

Another clear recollection [Mr. Hill proceeds], is the delight we used to take in a sort of game wherein we pretended to be monks. I can clearly see him now coming into my stall clad in a dressing-gown with some sort of cowl to it and gliding out again, and myself doing the same kind of thing, though I feel sure we should not have liked to have been discovered by our confrères at such childish proceedings! I also seem to remember that he wrote out some kind of story based on our monkish performances, but I may be wrong about this. Another kind of scene we used to enact was the offering of human sacrifices to Huitzilopochtli. He and I were the officiating priests, while the victim was usually D——, but I am quite sure that no pain of any kind was inflicted. I ought perhaps to add that it was I, and not Hugh, who was the originator of these games. Though we all ragged one another, Hugh never bullied anyone. He would always cry "bad luck" if the fun went too far!

He was always quick to note personal eccentricities and delight in them. Charlie C——, one of the servants, Miss H——, and H—— D——, to mention a few, were a continual joy to him. He was always ready to joke about people who amused him; and until his last year, when I saw less of him, I can hardly picture him except as smiling or laughing. . . . Not that Hugh was devoid of his own small mannerisms. I well remember the little shuffle he used suddenly to make while walking, and the real annoyance he showed when we imitated him or ragged him about it. He delighted, as did I, in "gas rags." This

consisted in turning on a row of gas jets in Chamber. One side, armed with towels, had to prevent the other from setting light to the gas by means of torches consisting of rolled-up newspapers lit at Chamber fire! The smell and mess at the end of the "rag" were indescribable, but the joy of the combat immense!

There are few relics of him at Eton. You may visit, of course, Long Chamber in which as Colleger he at first slept, and speculate how he will have decorated his dark wood cubicle.[1] But even at Cambridge the walls of his room offered no hint of the future development of his artistic power of choice. You can see the Upper School where he will have worked, or idled, and observe his name carved (later on, and not, of course, by his own hand) on "Gladstone's door" to the left of Dr. Keate's desk. That is about all. Even his brother, Mr. A. C. Benson, who was living at Eton at this time with Mr. Edward Lyttelton as a master, in "a quaint, white-gabled house called Baldwin's Shore" overlooking Barnes Pool, saw little enough of him, though, as Mr. Lyttelton's private pupil, Hugh came in and out of the house quite frequently. For several of Hugh's set were Mr. Benson's own pupils, and for Hugh to have been intimate with their tutor might, it was felt, create awkwardness on both sides. In any case, the aloofness in which most Public School boys live from their masters is something quite astonishing to those accustomed to the far more homely and accessible staff of most Catholic colleges.

Mr. A. C. Benson can supplement by a few lines the almost total silence observed by Hugh concerning his Eton friends. Since, indeed, he laments more than

[1] He wrote once to his mother: "I have bought some stuff you stick on windows, producing the most lovely stained glass, and have put some up in my room." That is the only hint.

once that his Cambridge friends drop entirely out of his life, I imagine that his school friendships did not prove more permanent. They were, I daresay, formed more on a basis of qualities which interested Hugh at the moment, or harmonised with his inquisitive and restless spirit, than on any deep foundation of affection or tried fidelity. Mr. Benson writes:

> The set of boys in which he lived was a curious one; they were fairly clever, but they must have been, I gathered afterwards, quite extraordinarily critical and quarrelsome. There was one boy in particular, a caustic, spiteful, and extremely mischief-making creature, who turned the set into a series of cliques and parties. Hugh used to say afterwards that he had never known anyone in his life with such an eye for other people's weaknesses, or with such a talent for putting them in the most disagreeable light.[1]

It was to this set that the small boy belonged whom Hugh was falsely accused of bullying. Not, indeed, that Hugh was incapable of resenting what displeased him or of imposing his views upon his neighbours.

The Rev. Dr. Lyttelton, now Headmaster of Eton, has written:

> A ludicrously-worded letter from him to his mother had reference to a serious difference of opinion between himself and two or three comrades on the one side, and an unfortunate but objectionable neighbour.
>
> The letter described a combined attack they were meditating, which, if I remember right, threatened to take the form of wrapping a towel round the offender's neck, and pulling the ends as hard as they could until something happened! I cannot be sure that the project was ever carried out. This must have been in 1889.
>
> His letter was excellent reading, the tone being quite as grave as the solemnity of the occasion demanded.

[1] *Hugh*, p. 41.

And his temper still revealed itself, as it was always to remain, frequently hot to boiling-point.

He spread his athletic interests more widely than did most of his fellows, but, perhaps, more thin. He steered one of the boats on the Fourth of June, and a photograph still survives of him in his white trousers and middy's braided coat, with a dirk and enormous Victorian bouquet. The mouth is already firmer, though I do not think this can be the "new photo" at which, Mrs. Benson wrote on February 7, 1888, "I so often look, and think how it looks older and purposeful." Becoming a cox was a delight to him, and he displayed the invitation to do so with pride. But besides the rowing, he played cricket, though perhaps not keenly. It was not a taste that actively survived.

"Your cricket successes," his mother writes on May 25, 1887, "*were* grand! Think of dry-bobbing to that extent while you are a wet bob! Well! well!—Genius is a great thing, and it is well known that boys inherit from their mother."

A little later it was from a precocious ambition to be of practical use in crises that he suffered. His mother wrote again from Addington Park on October 19, 1887:

DEAREST LADDIE,—You and your Ambulances! It will be a great assistance in the holidays (to) have so experienced a surgeon at hand in case of accidents. I hope we shall always wound ourselves, or break our bones, in exact correspondence with what you have learnt—and, having such strong family feeling, I have no doubt we shall.

(I have only one fear connected with it—*do* give it weight, Hugh. I am always anxious when I hear of your taking up new things, for fear your work should suffer. I don't mean only the actual preparation of given lessons, but the reading that *bears* on it which you ought to be doing at your present age—*do* think of this.)

The only form of sport which was to remain a passion, and now first reveals itself, was fishing.

(*From* MRS. BENSON.)

LAMBETH PALACE, S.E.,
June 22, 1888.

O most faithless of mortals (ME this time) not to have written on Tuesday. . . . *About the rods.* I have thought it well over, and feel that I should like to give you one, and a good one. So I should like you to get the *middle* one of the three you spoke of. The price I can't quite remember. You see, my darling, I want you to *do well* whatever you do—and I am trusting you not to let it interfere with your work. That is such a great and important thing that I should feel very reproachful if I found you had fished when you ought to have been working. But you are old enough not to fall into this snare, and I must trust to this—and fishing, I want you to fish well—and keep your rod in order, and not break it or lose any, or spoil it in any way. So with every good wish for your birthday I send it—antedating it by five months.

At Eton, a scholar at any rate was expected to do some work. Hugh's was "so poor," his brother says, "that it became a matter for surprise among his companions that he had ever won a scholarship." But Dr. Lyttelton declares, more favourably :

. . . I remember almost nothing. Hugh at the age of fourteen was a curious mixture of liveliness and dreaminess. His work was rather dishevelled in form but shewed considerable promise.

I should have put him among the second flight of Collegers, and not quite up to the standard of the very best.

He got into no scrapes, and seemed very happy.

At his home, however, more anxiety was felt. His father, now Archbishop, displayed the utmost concern, and perceived his ambitions, that Hugh should turn out

a "scholar" in the older and more academic sense, in danger of never being realised. I quote from a series of letters:

LAMBETH PALACE, S.E.,
May 7, 1887.

. . . You must take great pains to be accurate. This is your snare now—and accurate only means that "you give yourself carefully to a thing." It's not a gift like white hair or a Roman nose.

The Queen's Jubilee week intervenes, and provides one long distraction:

LAMBETH PALACE, S.E.,
June 25, 1887.

You will, like all of us, have had a week of regular irregularity—everything that is usual broken in upon—and I am sure you will never forget the Queen's Jubilee as long as you live—may that be long . . . And now, dear laddie, with all those wonderful pictures before your eyes, and all those memories stored up, do ask God to make nothing be in vain—and ask Him to make your work steadier, and more careful and good every day. It is such a pleasure, and happy thought for the future, when you do well.

ADDINGTON PARK, CROYDON,
September 27, 1887.

. . . And there is *one* thing which you want the habit of—but which your powers of resolution are quite equal to—viz. *to do the work in the first part, and not in the last part of the time allowed for it.* You are capital in resolving to get out of bed, and doing it—only be just as resolute about *the right moment* for beginning work—and you would do excellently. . . . God bless you. Don't forget Dr. Arnold's prayer.

ADDINGTON PARK, CROYDON,
October 8, 1887.

I am glad you liked the box of instruments. They are very good ones. And I had a box given me by my uncle about your age, which perpetually serve me and *comfort* me. So I thought you would like a set for your birthday present.

The unstudious boy is given a tutor for the summer holidays, and on November 13, 1887, his father again writes:

November 13, 1887.

. . . No doubt the holiday tutoring was very useful. . . . Mr. Mitchell says you are "*improving*" but that "there is still *room for Improvement*"—if there is *room* for "Improvement," pray ask him (Mr. Improvement) into it, and get him to sit down. Be hospitable to him.[1]

That the situation was felt, at Lambeth, as acute, is clear from a letter written by his mother at about this same time.

Addington Park, Croydon,
October 25, 1887.

By all means have bread and milk for supper,[2] if you like it best. . . . I wonder how all goes with you. You know, I needn't tell you that—you know how delightful I think all good and nice amusements—but I am sometimes afraid, my dearest boy, that you may be forgetting how critical this term is to you. I hate anything that sounds like a threat—this isn't that—but it *is* a reminder. Because the term is passing, and each day is fixing, whether you will or no, your fate in a way quite different from the ordinary way—and I know you are inclined *at the moment* to lose sight of this. O Hugh, *do* remember all that was said to you last holidays! We only don't say it always because there is no good in that, but it becomes like a tale that is told—but *our minds* don't alter. We must help you to gain character and purpose and all those things that

[1] The Archbishop, on November 25, 1887, uses these words: "Martial is very witty, is it not? so terse and neat." I wish diffidently to suggest that anyone who could speak of Martial as "*it*," reveals that he still "felt" that astoundingly human (though perhaps most displeasing) creature as a book, not a man. This really differentiates the Archbishop's attitude—though it was not confined to him—towards school study of the classics, from that which Hugh was, I believe, capable of taking, but which, from lack of assistance, he never took. Still, here was Hugh reading Martial at only just sixteen!

[2] Not that Hugh was above gastronomic preoccupations.

Eton College, Windsor. 1888.

Please ask Beth to send my hamper *at once* if she can—because we have *literally not one morsel to put in our mouths*. We are literally starving, though I don't wish in the least to alarm you, but we are wasting away with famine.

you need, and it must be by *deeds* now, not words. Deeds which would be as sad to us as they would to you, but which we should do all the same, with God's help. I feel as if I were some one else writing to you—it came over me so this morning how terribly critical it was—I didn't think you seemed quite to be realising it—and I thought I must just write one great *plead* to you, and then leave it—but don't *you* leave it—do take it home to you—sixteen on November 18th. Martin was only seventeen when he came out head of the school at Winchester.

But a little later news comes that he is working better —"only go on and on—there is plenty of possibility—we *know*—do use it all."

The year 1888 passed in fitful improvement and relapse. The Archbishop had been reading the *Medea* of Euripides in Mr. Arthur Sidgwick's blue-backed edition, with his son during the holidays, and on February 11, 1888, he wrote :

LAMBETH PALACE, S.E.,
February 11, 1888.

MY DEAREST HUGHIE,—I hope these cold winds have not nipped your nose or your throat. I am slowly struggling out of the serpentine coils of a cold which has gripped me like a Laocoon all over.

I have even not cared for riding—but Maggie and I went quickly round Battersea Park this morning.

When you have done a good bit of composition some time soon, send it me. Have you found "Medea Sidgwick Blue" *tell?*

How we envy Nellie her sunshine, to say nothing of her Niles and her Crocodiles and Obelisks!

I have got a beautiful book of "Monuments" which reveal the fact that there are more beautiful things in London than I knew of.

Make Mr. Luxmoore tell you how he thinks you are going on and getting on—ask him straight out—and tell me on Tuesday.

We are going down for a few hours to Winchester on Monday. You remember *why*—and will remember us there. Happy Sunday to you.—Your loving father,

EDW. CANTUAR.

To his mother, Hugh himself would write :

ETON COLLEGE, WINDSOR. 1888.

Mr. Lyttelton has been talking to me, and I am going to work just lots—I am going to read Green's history this half, and begin to learn Italian, by myself. I am glad I am not to be *made* to learn it, solemnly, for two hours a day—I hate that.

On March 23, 1888, the Archbishop wrote from Lambeth Palace to Hugh, who was working up for Trials in Mr. A. C. Benson's room :

. . . I quite agree that your handwriting *is* improving very much. It looks very neat, and is very legible—and will be, I think, a good scholarly hand.

May 4, 1888.

How are you getting on ? Who are you up to ? What are your books ? Can I send you anything ? Mind you tell me all.

Yet just a year afterwards the anxious note sounds unaltered :

May 19, 1889.

I hope you are not letting the classical work be impaired—I rather thought some of the edges seemed a *little* rubbed off in the last construing I heard of yours. Of course you must not let *that* happen, whatever you do.

Of course, too, the fact remains that Hugh Benson never became a "scholar" in any sense, and never wanted to, and probably never could have, become one. Even had the order, say, of a religious superior, made it his duty to apply himself consistently to "scholarship," he would quite certainly have been miserable, and therefore unsuccessful. Even in his chosen department, ascetical and mystical theology, he never could work save by fits and starts ; and at Rome, when his new Catholic fervour, environment, and the subject, conspired to make study tolerable to him, he cries out, at the prospect of an

obligatory three years of theology, "I doubt whether I COULD have stood it."

Possibly the violent clash of this artist's temperament with the clumsy method mostly in vogue at Eton and, of course, nearly everywhere else, when Benson was a boy, was responsible for the fact that after four years he "had learned so to hate the classics that I have never, willingly, read a Greek play since; I fumbled, the other day only, over a sum in simple division, and it has never entered my head to try and win a Latin Verse prize in the *Westminster Gazette*. . . . There are to-day, I suppose, still left two subjects which I can study without repugnance —history and English; since in neither of these two branches of knowledge can I remember a single lesson ever being given me while I was at school."

In the same article, which appeared in *Everyman*, December 24, 1912, he asserts that at his crammer's, where he went for a year after leaving Eton, he learnt "not just a few examinational tips, a few brilliant and telling touches, but more of the solid principles of mathematics, more of the general outlines of history in its broad and really important aspect, more of the real glories of the classics . . . than in all my four years at Eton." In Brittany, too, where he spent a month or so, he found that French was a language in which ". . . real ideas could be conveyed," and learnt more of it than ever at Eton. He puts this down to the total disregard at Eton (and, of course, he explicitly declares, at all of the greater public schools) of the idiosyncrasies of the individual. Over all alike rolls the traditional Juggernaut. Eton is, however, without guessing it, the most insane of specialists, he urges, and drills the boys remorselessly in a sub-department of classical study, and teaches them to

wield a few only of the tools of the most narrow-minded and complacent class in the world, "the classical grammarian." He concludes by lamenting the dreariness of such teaching as is given, and asks, "Whose business was it to interest me, if not my masters'?"

The best retort which I have seen addressed to this article appeared in the same periodical, from the pen of an Eton master, and its simplest argument was that Hugh Benson was speaking of an Eton already twenty years distant. The writer could point to increased specialisation, and could plead the apologia of wearied masters, and could mention, as contrary instance, Mr. A. C. Benson himself and the history lessons which he made famous. Of course, "instances to the contrary" prove little. Probably all schools will have at least one master in them who can "interest" his boys, or even thrill them, like E. E. Bowen of Harrow, or Cory of Eton, or Mr. A. C. Benson. The question of amount of specialisation, and its proper moment, is, moreover, still an open one. And though much was dead in the old education given in our schools, much is shoddy in the tinkering that goes on too often nowadays, and is called reform. It is even a question whether to live vulgarly be not worse than to die like Sir Leicester Dedlock. It remains that Hugh Benson did not solve his problem. Even he would have probably granted that in modern schools chaos has often replaced petrifaction, and that no more educationally appalling spectacle can be conceived than a would-be educational establishment simultaneously blanched by the blight of the examination system and harassed by the chameleon-tinted whims of modernizers.

Of course all purely intellectual education should be subordinated to the general training of the character.

This was what preoccupied, I need not say, the mind of the Archbishop and his wife far beyond mere scholarship.

By quoting a few extracts from his parents' letters, I may make it clear what tendencies in Hugh needed, in their opinion, stimulus or check.

I am sure [the Archbishop wrote on May 7, 1887], you won't forget all our talks about Confirmation—and, what is much more important, you will be sure to remember *Confirmation itself*—your promises—and the certainty that God will give you the strength you need— . . . let your *last day at home* before going to school be a day that shall leave happy and sweet memories with everyone. Do you understand?—I hope you will have a happy and thoughtful Sunday.

Hugh had indeed showed, at first, however, no attraction towards Confirmation, and that rite had been postponed for a year or two. This tendency to *laisser aller* was very marked at this time and annoyed his father gravely.

ADDINGTON PARK, CROYDON,
October 21, 1887.

I asked you particularly at once to answer me a certain question. I was depending on the answer coming at once. Please let me know directly.

I want also to know how you *think* you are doing in school.

I wrote very fully lately about other things. And so I will add no more.

I wish you a good and happy Sunday.—Your affectionate father, EDW. CANTUAR.

His mother saw the same need for accentuating the harder or more self-sacrificing side of his life:

ADDINGTON PARK, CROYDON,
November 17, 1887.

DEAREST OF DEAR BOYS,—All best and sweetest wishes for to-morrow. . . . My own dear boy, you know I long that you may have all best blessings—specially just now the development of manhood which sixteen

years seems appropriate to— . . . Come home to us proud and happy.

Incidentally, one may add that his tendency, now, to slackness showed itself in a total inability to keep accounts, which, indeed, pursued him throughout life, with the exception of pathetic periods of attempted accuracy.[1] But having said this, I must undoubtedly emphasize the fact that by no means was any radical nervelessness or apathy then or ever apparent in him. He was full of his own interests, and endlessly busy over them. Moreover, he loved his home ties, and was "fussy" for letters from Mrs. Benson, who wrote regularly on Tuesdays, with the rarest lapses, due to the enormous exactions of the Archiepiscopal career. With his sister, too, he was on the best of terms. A characteristic letter survives, to write which mother and sister joined:

May 12, 1888.

DEAREST LADDIE,—I did enjoy your letter immensely, and I am going now to be quite regular again in writing. I haven't been very well—and things have been difficult. . . . Oh! oh! *did* they call his hammock an "unnecessary luxury"?[2] NEVER mind—[Miss Margaret Benson

[1] (From MRS. BENSON)

LAMBETH PALACE, S.E.,
July 15, 1889.

N.B.—Mind you write to me fully about this [unpaid boat subscription at Eton], for I must know all about it thoroughly. It amounted to £2, 0s. 0d. *Do* give your mind to be careful about money—and accounts . . . situated as we are, it is even more important for us than for others to be very careful.

But we shall see that later on he has his accounts kept for him, and had a good head for money matters.

Nor was he even now unaware of certain temperamental deficiencies. He writes in 1887 (?):

"Could you send me 5s. of the 10s. that I have during the half—I had rather not have the whole 10s. at once, as I know I should spend it all too quick."

[2] Hugh had observed about the authority who had forbidden him to put his hammock up:

"I should love to tell him that *he* is quite 'unnecessary,' and *certainly* not a 'luxury,' and therefore he mayn't be 'up.' I never heard such BOSH!"

continues.] Mama couldn't finish this, so I am going to. . . . We are going to Parties to-night—to dinner, and then on, like regular Londoners, to the Russian ambassador's. Beth wants me to put on a soiled dress, because she says she always reckons that foreigners' houses will be dirty. Mr. B. has come to-day. He looks rather stiff, I think, but you may put him on your list—who knows? It is such an inscrutable list.

On his side, Hugh appealed willingly to his sister at intellectual crises:

ETON COLLEGE, WINDSOR,
May 12.

I have been elected to "College Pop," and have to make my opening speech next Saturday on "Sunday Closing," and have written to Maggie to ask her for some arguments about it: I want several, as I shall have to speak last, and therefore shall probably have several taken by other people before my turn comes.

I seem thus to perceive in Hugh a personality full of "stuff," fluid as yet, but destined to "set" very firmly and to take the stamp with edges unusually cleanly cut. But that was for the future.

Meanwhile religion was, not quite wholly in abeyance, perhaps, but dormant in the main.

"I cannot recall," Mr. Hill affirms, "any strong *religious* feeling in Hugh. I remember him telling me with rather a show of boredom how he was expected 'to go to chapel' in the holidays at Addington every day, or at least take part in some service—after breakfast, I think it was. He, S——, and myself used to snatch a fearful joy in watching X—— conducting the services in chapel and imitating him afterwards."

Reverence for the essential object of religion and a detached, even amused, criticism of its cult, can quite well go together, as Greek and medieval history can show, and as Hugh's own life will, by many examples, prove; or can it be that at this period he was anticipating "that

terrible age" (of eighteen) when "the soul seems to have dwindled to a spark overlaid by a mountain of ashes—when blood and fire and death and loud noises seem the only things of interest, and all tender things shrink back and hide from the dreadful noonday of manhood"?[1] This, of course, would at any time be true no more than partially of Hugh Benson, who was never particularly noisy, less so even than the average public school boy, who can be relied upon to conceal his callow instincts, save on the occasions strictly scheduled by public opinion, under the most rigidly non-committal mask; and he was never purely destructive, even when he took vehemently to sport. Here, too, he followed his own line, his father and mother having been confessedly "Buddhists" in the matter of taking life, while to the Archbishop, wantonly to destroy flower or fern appeared a downright breach of the Commandment which forbids man to take in vain the name of his Maker.

Hugh therefore asked at last when his Confirmation was to occur, and was genuinely astonished to find it had been put off because he had shown no sincere desire for it. He had regarded it as a kind of "spiritual coming-of-age" which happened automatically. At least, he felt, the Archbishop ought to have "given him a lead."

Dr. Lyttelton writes of Hugh's "preparation":

> I can recall the exact spot in a huge armchair where he sat and I was preparing him for his Confirmation. I don't think he understood much, and was not the sort of boy to feel very deeply the sense of sin.

And Hugh recalls that these half-dozen talks, according to the custom of that time, went chiefly on the topics of morality and the need of being strenuous. A suggestion,

[1] *Light Invisible*, p. 19.

Hugh says, of "informal confession," elicited, naturally, the response that he had nothing to reveal. Dr. Goulburn's book, *Personal Religion*, was presented to him, and remained with pages uncut. A discussion on the propriety of fives being played in the afternoon issued in a decision favourable to the game, which was played, however, with a "slightly chastened air." He lost the Maltese cross his mother gave him, and was depressed at the feeling, sincerely obeyed at first, that Communion, more impressive than Confirmation, implied a duty of behaving better in the future. A copy of Bishop Ken's Prayers for Winchester scholars, in the "gracious formality" of their Caroline English, and discovered in a store-room at Lambeth, touched his imagination. He used it assiduously for a few months—then dropped it, and with it all prayer, and confined his Communions to occasions when absence would have caused remark.

Not that the Chapel failed to affect him, though it still lacked the dignity of bronze and rich blue marble for its altar, and had less coat-armour on the walls of its antechapel, than since the Boer War, to give it colour. Still, the manifold slender and soaring lines of its Perpendicular architecture create spontaneously the effect of aspiration, and the singing is sometimes beautiful, and often of that "heartiness" which impresses visitors so profoundly and is not too curiously examined into, as to cause and quality, even by the singer. Apart, however, from such emotions as the place and time might afford, there was no strengthening of the soul by dogma: the professors of religion themselves held but rarely to clear dogmatic creed, and, anyhow, in a representative institution like a big public school, especially when it is one of the older foundations, to preach a definite dogma is impossible.

Above all, Benson argues, in things spiritual as in things intellectual, there was no catering for the individual soul; nothing comparable to "direction"—he will not say, to "confession." In the Confirmation "jaws," dogma might have reared a timid head, and personal confidences have been solicited. Benson's tutor did indeed ask him if he had any "difficulties," and, when he recovered from the shock, he answered No, having, he afterwards declared (in *Everyman*, January 3, 1913), at least twenty or thirty topics on which it would have benefited him enormously throughout life to have spoken, in properly safeguarded confidence, to a wise man. Briefly, it may be asserted that there is no possible substitute for the confessional, or, rather, for a priest accustomed to that tribunal and thoroughly trained. When Benson alludes in *Everyman* to the Evangelical schools with their heart-to-heart talks and "conversions," and to the Anglican schools which, like those of the Woodard foundation, have some sort of approximation, exteriorly, to the Catholic system, he knows quite well he does so only in an effort to be impartial, and also, perhaps, to recommend his view more easily to a general public such as he sought to reach when writing in that periodical; and that really there is no kind of comparison to be made between them and the immemorial Catholic practice and elaborated theory. No claims of courtesy and tolerance demand of us that we should in any way delude ourselves or others upon this point. In consequence, therefore, of this lack of personal direction, or even of general dogmatic instruction, the mystical element in boys tends to break out fantastically, or at least quite indefinably—and it is constantly forgotten what incurable mystics most boys turn out to be, intermittently at least, and probably

in secret. In Catholic schools all religion is canalised, so to say, and even devotion flows mainly within fixed limits. Where religion was firmly taught at home, it would show itself, at Eton, say, in the voluntary attendance of a very considerable number of boys at the Communion Service in the parish church when none was provided in the chapel. Where the family was High Church, it might produce an apostle who should form a group to recite Compline each night; where it was Evangelical, "conversion" might be responsible for Bible-meetings and prayer, terminated at once, on the only occasion on which Benson assisted, by an explosion of half-hysterical laughter. This, it must be owned, was "wholly uncharacteristic of Eton," as was the horrible incident which he relates in his *Confessions*. His Low Church evangelist invited an "old boy" to come down to Eton and address the House, which he did, emotionally, and giving his speech the air of a confession. Naturally the boys were appalled at the offence —for as such everyone, not Eton boys alone, must feel it—against sheer "form" and taste. For a boy, sin and sanctity are above all else to be kept secret. To expose the roots of his soul, or indeed any part of that shrinking thing's construction, should be, for him, the grossest of indecencies.

It would be idle to dwell upon Hugh Benson's reminiscences of the Eton moral code. It is that of all public schools, and has nothing to do with theology or even the Ten Commandments. If you don't interfere with others, others will let you alone; boots hurled at boys who persist in saying their prayers survive only as adornments of those school-stories which are written for the entertainment of aunts and others who like to imagine they know

what their nephew's life at school is like, and are rightly clear that it is not probable he will tell them. A strictly limited truthfulness, a very curious scheme of "honour," athletic courage, verbal modesty, liberality, and cleanness in dressing and eating are exacted by Public Opinion as Good Form, and what may have gone to fashion this it appears to me idle even to attempt to formulate. It remains that it is as ridiculous to regard a public school as a "sink" or "den" of iniquity (these are the words one mostly has heard used), as to describe a Catholic school as an enclosed paradise of virtue. Each has its code, which can only be appreciated by close and sympathetic study; and even where the codes may coincide, the whole interior attitude may be so different—at least at certain levels in the boys' souls—that to compare the two is to court the utmost error.

It is interesting to observe that the Archbishop, in the very year that was supplying Hugh with the best materials for these future reflections, was writing, on his sixtieth birthday, an autobiographical note. In it he says:

> Now, if I think—what would I do quite differently if it came again? The plainest point is, that I would speak to my boys much more religiously—and straight to the point of Love of God, in educating a great school. The chapel and the sermons not individual enough, though, so far as they went, right and not to be changed.

His son also demanded an insistence on that Love which alone should be capable of ousting its own caricatures. Yet perhaps he and Hugh—the Catholic Hugh, at any rate—were never really at one about what vital religion really was. It will not be denied that the Archbishop actively disliked as well as disbelieved in Catholicism, and, though he could, as we saw, "think

with a workman's mind," he never could look out at heaven and earth with Catholic eyes.[1]

However, the time had come for Hugh to choose a career, and his tastes inclined, it seemed, towards the Indian Civil Service. That this was a disappointment to his father cannot be denied; but nothing can equal the loyalty with which the Archbishop refrained from coercing his son's liberty, and demanded nothing more than that the situation should be clearly stated and deliberately thought out.

He wrote on May 27, 1889:

LAMBETH PALACE, S.E.

. . . I want you to have clear before you the questions which we have to decide, and I shall be ready to hear your views about them—and I pray that we may be led to make a right decision. [He puts the case, and recapitulates.] The three plans are—

1. To try for the I.C.S. in 1890:—To do so with the best chance of success seems to involve your leaving Eton this summer. [He adds on re-reading:] If you failed in 1890, what would you do?—there would be a year between *that* and Cambridge *ordinarily*.

2. To try for the I.C.S. in 1890 without leaving Eton now—and to go on at Eton, if you fail, until 1891. This does not seem very hopeful as regards success for India.

3. To give up the I.C.S. and go on at Eton till the time comes for going to Cambridge. . . . If this latter plan is adopted, I hope you would not find the *stimulus* removed, and that you would *really work* on with all your might at classics and mathematics mainly. I should be much disappointed if you worked less well.

Now, then, the choice is before you, and you must think it over and let me know.

[1] Nothing is stranger than to read, as a Catholic, his comments on—I will choose two points—the practice of the Confessional and its results, and modern monasticism, especially in modern Italy. His views are so utterly justified from his point of view, and yet so psychologically untrue to fact, while so exclusive even of the *surmise* that they are thus untrue. . . .

From the same:

LAMBETH PALACE, S.E.,
June 3, 1889.

MY DEAREST HUGH,—I am very sorry to think of your leaving Eton. The loss of a year in the Sixth can never be made up, and in your case it would be two years. All the good of school then gets concentrated and made productive. But I said you should, if you resolved on desiring it, have a chance of entering the Indian Civil Service, and so I shall not throw any obstacle in your way by any action of mine. . . . It will be grievous work parting with you for India, but God watches there as well as here, "without slumbering or sleeping."

I hope you often say over the Psalm Quicumque Confidit.

Hugh decided that the Indian Civil Service was what he really wanted, and on June 20 the Archbishop noted in his diary:

A new power of manliness seems to have come over him. I trust, in answer to the many prayers, "that he may know himself to be God's servant and God's child, and live as to the Lord, and not as to men."

"Our little sheltered boy!" his mother says and breaks my heart. I always reckoned on this one to be my great friend as I grew old.

It is no doubt true that Hugh had been working harder for some time, and had won his way into "First Hundred," as the Sixth Form with the next three classical divisions in the school are habitually and officially called.

On April 28 his mother wrote from Lambeth:

April 28.

Hurrah! and Hurrah! for the *First Hundred*. I am *that* glad, and so are we all. I told your father in the middle of a distinguished company—I couldn't hold it in—and he was so glad. . . . Let the term be a *beautiful* one, my own dear boy, full of work and all lovely things. I *hate* your reading *Truth* and *Police News*. Do think better of it . . . it's like preferring a sewer to the Thames.

Moreover, he wrote for the Hervey Prize Poem, on Father Damien, and won it, which caused everybody quite as much astonishment as pleasure.[1] But for all that he was condemned to leave Eton, and on his last night there he wrote:

I write this on Thursday evening after ten. Peel keeping passage.[2]

My feelings on leaving are—
Excitement.
Foreboding of Wren's and fellows there.
Sorrow at leaving Eton.
Pride at being an old Etonian.
Certain pleasure in leaving for many trivial matters.
Feeling of importance.
Frightful longing for India.
Homesickness.
DEAR ME![3]

[1] Yet he had shown an astonishing bent for versification. Two poems of his survive from 1881, of which some lines are quoted in the Appendix. Also in 1888 or 1889 he wrote two stories: *Fate*, and an unnamed ghost story. I give the outline of these in the same place. In *The Present Etonian*, November 6, 1888, is a conventionally humorous account of a Village Concert; and in *Household Queries* rather later, a Tennysonian epic, a poem on *Loki*.

[2] "Peel is Sidney Peel, then in Sixth Form. The passages are patrolled by the Sixth Form from ten to half-past, to see that no boy leaves his room without permission." A. C. Benson, *Hugh*, p. 46.

[3] There are very few relics of this period. One is a letter from Beth who, Mr. A. C. Benson tells us, found letter-writing most laborious:

ADDINGTON PARK, CROYDON.
[? *November*, 1887] *Tuesday.*

DEAREST,—One line to tell you I am sending your Box to-morrow, Wednesday. I hope you will get it before tea-time. I know you will like something for tea; you can keep your cake for your Birthday. I shall think about you on Friday. Everybody has gone away, so I had no one to write for me. I thought you would not mind me writing to you. Dearest love from your dear

BETH.

A deliciously frightful sepia sketch, too, survives. It shows two leafless trees with carrion crows seated on them. The sky is black; rain pours down. From a marsh a hand protrudes, and on it is a label bearing the words, A ROTTING CORPSE. Upon the back of this is to be found his time-table for the "First

Hugh Benson left Eton, then, and if we are unable to detect during his stay there much that will be characteristic, we can certainly notice in this final document a really remarkable self-knowledge. Few boys would own, in the very first place, to excitement; few, to apprehension of the next step to be taken and of the *equals* to be expected there. To note that one "feels important" is frank beyond the common; the "frightful longing" for India is in itself a revelation. No amount of fear could annul the desire of the moment. This fear and this "appetite" will accompany him through life. And the home-sickness is, I take it, for the England and the parents he would leave when India summoned him, and by no means for Eton; for her, he has already expressed his qualified regrets. And the whole ends with the supremely characteristic exclamation which he will use to the end when standing aghast at the bewilderments of life and its exactions; and, after all, it was long ago decided that the mother of all philosophy was Wonder.

Hundred." It includes hours for Herodotus, Livy, Horace, Vergil, the *Bacchæ*, the Epistle to the Romans, Greek and Latin prose, Latin verse and Greek iambics. Besides this I find only one note-book, full of drawings of butterflies and moths, with very full notes. The drawings are really excellent for a boy of his age, and suggest that he will always do better at diagrams than at realistic sketches. I must however note the possibility of this note-book, though found with Hugh Benson's possessions, having been in reality the work of Mr. E. F. Benson. It must be, too, confessed that his handwriting is better at this period than ever it was to be again, though less characteristic.

CHAPTER III

AT WREN'S, 1889–1890

I dimly guess what Time in mists confounds ;
Yet ever and anon a trumpet sounds
From the hid battlements of Eternity ;
Those shaken mists a space unsettle, then
Round the half-glimpsèd turrets slowly wash again.
FRANCIS THOMPSON.

HUGH BENSON left Eton, then, before his time, and after a brief stay abroad was sent to a crammer's, whose assistance was regarded by Hugh's family as an "operation" made necessary by his somewhat unsatisfactory intellectual progress.

He went, however, first of all to Dinan, and on June 30 his father wrote the following letter, quoted also by Mr. A. C. Benson in *Hugh*. It is so characteristic that I make no apology for quoting it again in full :

LAMBETH PALACE, S.E.,
June 30, 1889.

MY DEAREST HUGHIE,—We have been rather mourning about not hearing one word from you. We *supposed* all would be right as you were a large party. But *one* word would be so easy to those who love you so, who have done all they could to enable you to follow your own line, against their own wishes and affection !

We hope at any rate you are writing to-day. And we have sent off "Pioneers and Founders," which we hope will both give you happy and interesting Sunday reading and remind you of us.

Mr. Spiers writes that you are backward in French, but getting on rather fast.

I want you now at the beginning of this cramming year to make two or three Resolutions, besides those which you know and have thought of often and practised :

1. To determine never to do any secular examination work on Sundays—to keep all reading that day as fitting "The *Lord's* Day," and the "Day of Rest."

I had a poor friend who would have done very well at Oxford, but he would make no difference between Sunday and other days. He worked on just the same—and in the examination *itself*, just as the goal was reached, he broke down and took no degree. The doctors said it was all owing to the continuous nervous strain. If he had taken the Sundays it would just have saved him.

Lord Selborne was once telling me of his tremendous work at one time, and he said, "I never could have done it, but that I took my Sundays. I never would work on them."

We have arranged for you to go over to the Holy Communion one day at Dinan. Perhaps some nice fellow will go with you—Mr. Spiers will, anyhow. Tell us *which* Sunday, so that we may all be with you.

Last night we dined at the Speaker's, to meet the Prince and Princess of Wales. It was very interesting. The Terrace of the House of Commons was lighted with electric light. A steamer went by and cheered!

The Shah will fill London with grand spectacles, and I suppose his coming will have much effect on politics—perhaps of *India* too. All are well.—Ever your most loving father, EDW. CANTUAR.

I am going to preach at the Abbey to-night.

Hugh remained very pleased with the progress he made in French; but he never kept it up, and, incredible as it may seem, he went through life unable either really to read or talk it, though in the work, both literary and personal, to which he gave himself, it may be described as only just not essential.

By mid-July, indeed, he has finished with French, and is in Switzerland, I gather, on the way to his uncle, Mr. Christopher Benson, who lived at Wiesbaden. His father speaks of "your changed far-away life," and adds on July 12, 1889:

You must be sure to keep up the high strong line of manliness which all your training has led you on to. And you will not forget that he CANNOT be a true "MAN"

who is not a "*man of GOD.*" . . . Don't forget about *working* on Sunday. Never do it. Regard it—as it is—as the "Day of *Rest and Worship.*"

One fragment from his stay in France is worth preserving:

We went a long expedition yesterday, sixty miles there and back, by carriage: and returning, I ran about seven miles out of the thirty by the side of the carriage, and am hardly at all stiff this morning.

I send you one photograph of myself and a splendid Algerian greyhound "Simoun," who can keep well up with an average train fifteen miles, and a carriage a hundred and fifty miles: this also shows the colour of my hands and face very accurately: I have also grown about four feet: and another of a fishing expedition we went: I should like the one of the dog and me back when I come, as I have not another of it, and I want to keep them all together.

By July 22 the news that he had won the Hervey Prize Poem had reached Lambeth. "Dr. Warre," writes his father, "says it has a very good tone about it and a quiet thoughtfulness that lends it a charm." I believe that these poems were not printed, and doubtless the loss of such compositions is not heavy: still, it would have been entertaining to see Hugh at his most academic and conventional. This poem brought him, a little later, as a present from the Archbishop, a portrait of Father Damien's "fine, kind, benevolent, determined face."

HOTEL DE LA PLAGE, PORTRIEUX,
July 25, 1889.

MY DEAR PAPA,—Thank you very much for your letter: I was so tremendously surprised about the Hervey Prize.[1]

[1] To his mother he wrote:

PORTRIEUX, *July* 27.

I was so enormously surprised about the Hervey Prize—I had so little thought of getting it, that I had forgotten all about it, and for the first moment couldn't remember what it was.

Nothing could better exemplify his already triumphant instinct for forgetting what was past and going straight on to the next thing.

I should like to stay with Mr. Kevill Davies very much: it sounds very nice, and should prefer to have only one room: it would seem more compact and altogether nicer, I think, to have all my things in one room.

H. seemed to like Mrs. Kevill Davies very much.

I think also that it would be very convenient lunching at Mr. Spiers'; I should only have to, I believe, four times a week: and the other two days I could go back to Longridge Road: Isn't it a pity about H.? He has been working tremendously, sometimes fourteen hours a day: and they all said he was certain to get in—but he failed. He was in the Indian and Civil—I should think probably he overworked.

I suppose Mama will write and tell me the particulars of my journey. I can leave here any day on or after next Thursday.—Your very loving son,

ROBERT HUGH BENSON.

Hugh had not, however, concerned himself at first with staying at a stranger's. On June 10 he had characteristically written to his mother:

ETON COLLEGE, WINDSOR,
June 10, 1889.

I have got a lovely idea, but don't say anything about it yet: I don't know if it would be possible, but I don't see why not.

To have two rooms in Morton's Tower got ready, I could bring up all my things from Eton and furnish them, or at least one of them, and stay there always. I could come over for meals in the house while you were there; and when you were not there, Mrs. Humphreys or Mrs. Parker could cook for me: it would be lovely.

. . . . . .

It would have all the advantages of lodgings, such as being able to go in and out when I wished, besides having none of the disadvantages.

Meanwhile Hugh is learning to climb, and apparently taking risks. An echo is heard in a letter from his mother: "The fearful incident of the rocks and the rope made my blood run rather cold."

Early in August he is at Wiesbaden, and there spends a few days to learn some German. He is enthusiastic over his progress, and his mother, with deliberate humour, hopes he is getting on as fast with German as he did with French. German, too, alas! remained an unlearnt language for him always. Of incidents at Wiesbaden none can be recalled save the purchase of a fox-cub, which Mrs. Benson regretted because it was extravagant (and he was sending in no accounts of his expenditure!), and he couldn't possibly carry it about with him. Beth, on her side, implored his mother to forbid him keeping it. "Foxes are so sly, and it'll be sure to kill him when it gets older."[1]

In mid-August he returned to England by way of Paris —"I saw the Exhibition," he writes, "and went half-way up the Eiffel Tower; just marvellous: 'Is it seen with the eyes?' is the first thing you think when you are near"[2]— and went to Wren's and Gurney's coaching establishment, lodging at the Rev. Kevill Davies's house in Kensington, for, on his return, he found he had crossed his family on their way out to the Riffel Alp where the Archbishop often went for a holiday. From Zermatt his mother wrote to him:

ZERMATT, *August* 25, 1889.

It is most horrid to be holiday-making here without you, and to think of you grinding your nine hours a day in stuffy old London. Still—India beckons, and Hugh says "I come"—and there is certainly no other way of coming. . . . There have been very few accidents this year. One man, who is getting better, rolled down the Matterhorn about 1200 feet, and bounded over two glaciers in his roll, he preserving complete consciousness all the time, and calculating whether or not he would fall into

[1] At Eton he is remembered for his fondness of animals. He proposed to cajole the Archbishop into keeping kangaroos at Addington.

[2] This was an exclamation of Beth's when she first saw a snow mountain in Switzerland.

the glacier. When he stopped he *got up*—and had his ice-axe in his hand all the time.

From the same place his father wrote two days later a long letter of advice on the importance of sleep and exercise, and concludes:

You know we fear our dear Martin did not know their importance.

He adds:

Keep your prayers and a few verses of the Bible-reading very undisturbed by anxieties—and as each piece of work begins, just quietly for one moment "lift up your heart,"—SVRSVM COR. Then all will go in peace—and your fortnightly (or weekly) communion I am sure you will not omit. It has been such a strength and growth to you—*testis sum.*

And he repeats the advice on September 12, 1889, adding:

It is a good thing both physically and spiritually to do what Prudentius says—

Corpus licet fatiscens
Jaceat recline paullum
Jesum tamen sub ipso
Meditabimur sopore;

which Martin translated:

Then let the weary body
A little while repose:
The last thought be of Jesus
Before thine eyelids close.

(You know the temporal use of *sub* = just before.)

It was at this period that one of Miss M. Benson's letters reveals for a moment the peculiarly close relations existing between herself and Hugh. She habitually wrote him letters of a unique charm. She had the Greek "irony"; and after most sensitive descriptions of scenery—Egypt,

Tenedos, Troy—which had really impressed her by its beauty or associations, was able herself to prick any bubble of pomposity or preciosity she might seemingly have blown, by the pin-point of her humour. Her extremely acute comments on, for instance, visitors, ecclesiastical duties, and the like, show a real mental detachment and objective power of "realising" what an atmosphere of ecclesiastical domesticity might tend normally to distort,[1] and she would laugh whole-heartedly at the "high talk," "such as," Beth said, "our gentlemen talk."

She, inspired by sitting in the chair of the Priest of Dionysus in the theatre at Athens, asks to be helped by Hugh, through reading and discussion, to get above the narrowing life of "doing my Duty." To be *absorbed* in "helping others" she sees to be "certain ruin." She wants to read with him, not as "a covert way of improving you—only I would rather read with you than with anyone—you like poetry, I know—besides—well—*you are you*—I wonder whether you know how much I have felt that, from the time when I used to teach you out of *Reading without Tears*—right up to now—when our relation is an *equal* one—for age matters so little after the very first years of all"; and at the time of his eighteenth birthday she adds:

I have been considering you as *well* over eighteen for some time past. . . . I must stop if this is to reach you before what Beth persists in calling your birth*day*, meaning your birth*moment*, *i.e.* 9.20 to-night. I remarked that the whole day was your birthday. She said, Oh! she thought not—it was 9.20.

I've been thinking that when some one edits your Life and letters, they will be puzzled over "Brer Rabbit,"[2] and

[1] And indeed it may in all courtesy be confessed that it would be difficult to encounter a family more serenely able and willing to observe and assess its own members than is hers.

[2] Her nickname for Hugh.

will rightly conjecture that "Brer" means brother, and make a brilliant suggestion that "Rabbit" is really a misreading for "Robert." Don't you think so? *Good-bye.*

In one sentence she reveals quite a number of intimate little facts.

"*None* of your dress clothes are here," she wrote in answer to a passionate appeal. "Beth says you must have them all." But, Miss Benson adds, a van will be needed for the transport of his boots.

And in a homely line or two she throws all that we have of light on Hugh's stay at his crammer's:

September 15, 1889.

I am sorry the other boys are like that—cads. But it's only, I suppose, what is to be expected, as Beth would say. But I am glad you have K. and D.

The fastidious Hugh came away from the risks of his environment untainted, but he failed in his examination for the Indian Civil Service, and it was settled he should go to Trinity College, Cambridge, and read there for Classical Honours.

In Benson, however, no mood, good or bad, maintained itself, at this period at any rate, for very long; and quite apart from a tangential interest in Theosophy, which sent him, while at Wren's, down by-ways full of excitement, if not of pleasantness, he found his arid waste refreshed by two sources, one of which was music, and the other J. H. Shorthouse's romance, *John Inglesant.* Of music I hope to speak later, here it must suffice to say that its enchantment drew him again and again to St. Paul's, and put a soul into its ceremonies; and, as to Isabel Norris in *By What Authority*, the echoing dignity of the Cathedral gave the first hint to Hugh of what corporate worship might mean. Liddon, then preaching there, did not more

than passingly affect him; the boy sat in organ-loft or stall, and let the music sweep his soul about, and cleansed his spiritual faculties from the clogging experience of merely materialistic behaviour. It may not have strengthened him; but at least it kept him active.

Of unreckonable importance was his encounter with *John Inglesant*. The strange history of this book is known. Written when its author was in full middle-age, delayed by the obstinate publishers till he was old, it obtained a success which savoured of the portentous. Doubtless this was due not wholly to its literary merits: it is long; it lacks balance; it has no climax; it is episodic. But it suited a party in the English Church, and this Quaker's romance played a considerable part in Anglican propaganda. But the sensation it created was incomparably wider and more varied than is produced by anything just sectarian. Shorthouse has managed to cast over persons, scenery, and episodes a glamour so enchanting that there is hardly any part that does not throb with vitality. He lights up what he touches, as it were, from within: it is as though sunlight were entangled in some fruit-tree all in flower; the very petals become incandescent; you can almost see the sap circulating, like bubbles of light, in the delicate veins of the leaves. Boyhood's imagination (if one more witness may be added to Hugh Benson's) falls an easy victim to *John Inglesant*, whose very name has something (I once fancifully felt) of that virility and that melody which make his story neither too sensuous nor ever less than magical. An older critic may marvel how the Birmingham chemist, who scarcely knew his England, and certainly had never left it, save by guide-book, succeeded in capturing not alone the various atmospheres of the world of Cavalier and of Puritan and of Laud,

but of Paris and of Florence, of Naples and of Rome; of cultured Cardinal's *palazzo*, of Jesuit house and Benedictine; of that strange Italian seventeenth-century life, with its almost Oriental juxtaposition of splendour and of squalor. Over all alike he draws one veil of mirage; the thing is so living, so solemn, and so sweet, that not a thousand inaccuracies in detail would buffet one into acknowledgment that the whole is anything but truthful.

Doubtless it was this sheer vitalism which first won Benson; it vivified for him this Caroline period with extraordinary success; and it is interesting to see how similar the temper of the two authors must have been by the similarity in character of what they select to speak of in their respective books, and to note with what close affinity (not identity) of point of view they envisage the life and problems of that age. But there is more than this; so much more, in fact, that I shall be forgiven for recalling the outline of *John Inglesant*.

Richard Inglesant was a servant of Cromwell, and visitor of the Priory of Westacre, with which, after its suppression, he was presented. His son John was an inquisitive and susceptible child, melancholy too, and at once sensuous and a student. Already at fourteen he was a "compleat Platonist," and interpreted the *Phaedo*. To the care of Mr. Hall, or Father St. Clare, a Jesuit, Richard Inglesant entrusted his son, anxious to see him made an agent of that politico-religious scheme which should bring the English Church, by a corporate movement, into communion with the See of Peter. Plato and St. Teresa sharpen his intellect without blunting his spirit of romance, and John learns to see the Divine Light shining everywhere through the created world, but most, through human nature. He passes through court and camp, and stays

with Nicholas Ferrar at his "Protestant Nunnery" of Little Gidding in Huntingdonshire. In Inglesant's life, the Little Gidding Sacrament-Sunday with its realisation of the immediate *Personality* of Christ, and the Jesuits, remain parallel influences, checking each the other, while Hobbes and Crashaw develop yet other sides of his rich personality. With philosophy and poetry, the love of Mary Collet (a very Beatrice, at Gidding, to this dreamier Dante) models his soul more even than does downright war undertaken for King Charles; though the secret service, loyally rendered, and cruelly repaid by the king's denial of his messenger, strengthens profoundly Inglesant's spiritual detachment. Prison and imminent death and, above all, the assassination of his brother Eustace, seem to complete his "purification": and in Paris he meets Mary Collet once more, but now a nun. Two paths, therefore, are placed before him—that of the soul crucified with Jesus amid the splendours of all pagan and Christian culture, and this the Jesuits preach; and that of simple self-surrender to the personal charm of Jesus, who should be followed in the desert, away from court or university, or political intrigue: Serenus de Cressy, the Benedictine, offers him this privilege. He turns from the monk, sorrowful amid his great possessions. Plato still, it seemed, should partly govern him; but still, and far more certainly, Christ loved the young man.

This servant of the Jesuits went on to Italy and Rome, with the fixed idea of vengeance on his brother's murderer more vivid, now, in his mind than ever. At Florence he meets Lauretta di Visalvo, his destined wife; but first he must conquer in her regard that earthliness of passion which imperils yet further his ever more clouded ideal. In the wan light of the dawn he renounces the promised ecstasy of sin; and though

you are left doubtful what precisely within him won that victory (for that a temptation fostered by passionate moonlight should wane when the cold grey morning blanches away the mystery of things, need mean no triumph carried off by or within the soul), at least it is clear that John had thus, at any rate, renounced two earthly great rewards, once for his king, and now, if not for God, at least for his spiritual concept of what Love should be. That scene in the midnight hut is unsurpassed for lofty human emotion; for mystical enchantment, the third renunciation, where John forgives his brother's murderer, Malvolti, whom he at last encounters, is supreme.[1]

When Benson says that *John Inglesant* influenced him, he does not merely mean that it vitalised for him the Caroline period of English history, even of English ecclesiastical Church history, still less that his description of the suppressed monasteries in *The King's Achievement* is very reminiscent of that at Westacre, and Ralph's loyalty to Cromwell in the same book, of John's fidelity to the faithless Charles II; nor even that the triple temptation, successfully encountered by Roger, which we read of in *Oddsfish* (a book first written at Rome, before his ordination, and directly under the spell of *John Inglesant*) is again reminiscent of Shorthouse's psychic series. Nor does he even perceive in the Quaker's sympathetic delineation of Molinos, the source of much of that orthodox Quietism he himself developed. Nor, of course, is the interweaving of the preternatural, and indeed of the elfish and bizarre, with the realistic, what most of all attracted him in *John Inglesant*. Even

[1] In this episode Shorthouse models himself with great exactness on the story of San Giovanni Gualberto.

the creation of the Hare Street colony, so to call it, realising as it did a dream first conceived after studying the exquisite interlude of Little Gidding and never allowed to fade, was not the chief result of the absolute passion Benson conceived for that romance.

To begin with, its revelation of the Personality of Jesus Christ came to him literally like the tearing of veils and the call of a loud trumpet, and a leaning forth of the Son of God to touch him. The veils swung back again, and silence was soon once more to swaddle his soul into inertia; but virtue had gone forth, and without his realising it, his life would appear to have been poised around a new axis; its centre of gravity was shifted; or, if you will, the notion of the dominancy of Jesus, having sunk into his subconsciousness, worked there in silence until in due time it revealed its adult significance. Flashed upon John during the Communion service at Little Gidding, the full blaze of revelation shone out for him when the blinded Malvolti, now a friar, told Inglesant of the spiritual vision which had reached him.

Since this was one of those pages which Hugh learnt and kept by heart, as having substantially altered him, I quote it without apology.

(The murderer of Eustace, you may remember, was sitting on the Capitol and, in imagination, seeing the whole of Rome, its churches, its worshippers, its crucifixes.)

"'Suddenly it seemed to me that I was conscious of a general movement and rush of feet, and that a strange and wild excitement prevailed in every region of Rome. The churches became empty, the people pouring out into the streets; the dead Christs above the altars faded

from their cross, and the sacred tapers went out of their own accord; for it spread through Rome, as in a moment, that a miracle had happened at the Ara Coeli, and that the living Christ was come. From where I stood I could see the throngs of people pouring through every street and lane, and thronging up to the Campidoglio and the stairs; and from the distance in the pale Campagna, from St. Paolo without the walls, and from subterranean Rome, where the martyrs and confessors lie, I could see strange and mystic shapes come sweeping in through the brilliant light.

"'He came down the steps of the Ara Coeli, and the sky was full of starlike forms, wonderful and gracious; and all the steps of the Capitol were full of those people down to the square of the Ara Coeli, and up to the statue of Aurelius on horseback above; and the summit of the Capitol among the statues, and the leads of the Palace Caffarelli, were full of eager forms; for the starlight was so clear that all might see; and the dead gods, and the fauns, and the satyrs, and the old pagans, that lurked in the secret hiding-places of the ruins of the Caesars, crowded up the steps out of the Forum, and came round the outskirts of the crowd, and stood on the Forum pillars that they might see. And Castor and Pollux, that stood by their unsaddled horses at the top of the stairs, left them unheeded and came to see; and the Marsyas who stood bound broke his bonds and came to see; and spectral forms swept in from the distance in the light, and the air was full of Powers and Existences, and the earth rocked as at the Judgment Day.

"'He came down the steps into the Campidoglio, and He came to me. He was not at all like the pictures of the Saints; for He was pale, and worn and thin, as though

the fight was not yet half over—ah no!—but through this pale and worn look shone infinite power, and undying love, and unquenchable resolve. The crowd fell back on every side, but when He came to me He stopped. 'Ah!' He said, 'is it thou? What doest thou here? Knowest thou not that thou art Mine? Thrice Mine—Mine centuries ago when I hung upon the Cross on Calvary for such as thou—Mine years ago, when thou camest a little child to the font—Mine once again, when, forfeit by every law, thou wast given over to Me by one who is a servant and friend of Mine. Surely, I will repay.' As He spoke, a shudder and a trembling ran through the crowd, as if stirred by the breath of His voice. Nature seemed to rally and to grow beneath Him, and Heaven to bend down to touch the earth. A healing sense of health and comfort, like the gentle dew, visited the weary heart. A great cry and shout arose from the crowd, and He passed on; but among ten thousand times ten thousand I should know Him, and amid the tumult of a universe I should hear the faintest whisper of His voice.'"

Upon this apparition in Hugh's life of a new transforming force we will make no comment, content with having registered it. Of a different character, but as important on its plane, was the conclusion reached by Inglesant in his travel of religious exploration. He was led to it, as a matter of fact, through the Platonism by which he had been encountered from childhood up—in its more pious forms with the Rosicrucian vicar of Ashley, in its more strictly intellectual, but also practical, aspect with St. Clare, and in its artistic and worldly and Renaissance presentation with the Cardinal at Rome, John's conversations with whom are, philosophically speaking, among the quite most fascinating pages of the book. Now

Platonism as Platonism made no sort of scholarly appeal to Hugh Benson: but its central and unchanging dogma was, the immersion of the Idea in matter, the shivering of the One into many, the expression of the Immutable Reality in shifting finite forms, illusory and dreamlike all of them; the reflection, finally, of the Absolute by the relative. Thus both John's Christianity and his Platonism conspired to make him see the world as itself something of a Sacrament—better, even, than the veiled Tabernacle, where the Godhead lurked within—in which the Ultimate God immediately conveyed and concealed Himself; not a veil merely, to hide the Ubiquitous, but a robe making visible the Unseen. Now both to Inglesant and to Hugh Benson the question propounded itself, How, in this world of mystery, where words belie the thought, and thought itself betrays the Word it would translate, can I *know* what the "true truth" is? Inglesant confessed that Christianity, having brought "sublimest Platonism down to the humblest understanding," had thereby been forced to reduce "its spiritual and abstract truth to hard and inadequate dogma." If, then, you cannot accept the dogma, acknowledge, he proclaimed, that "Absolute Truth is not revealed at all." Either Rome is right, or, whatever else of a theory may be devised, it must start from this, the non-revelation of final and universal Truth. "There is only one answer to the Papist argument—Absolute Truth is *not* revealed." Are we, then, to resign ourselves to pure Agnosticism? Is our soul to be for ever tormented by the surmise that the Light reaches it so broken, refracted, tinted, that perhaps this very light is darkness? No, urges Inglesant; within the soul is a *fons veri lucidus*; "in Thy light shall we see light"; the conscience can test, in my individual soul's case at least,

the value of what I seem to see. The Kingdom of God within me shall echo its Emperor's voice, reaching it from outside, if indeed it be His voice. . . . Benson, without knowing it, was already rejecting this spiritual individualism. The dilemma was already dimly presenting itself to him as it did to Inglesant. Either an Infallible Authority, speaking unmistakably in the ears of the multitude, or the guidance of the conscience, which, left to itself, means no more nor less than agnosticism with regard to the universal issues. He too was accepting the world and the Church as sacramental; and he was refusing to regard the veils and vestures of their Inhabitant as mere illusion, and to be discarded, *because* mere veils and vestures; rather they were elevated to His plane and quality, and of indescribably high import, because they were *His*.

Inglesant, after expounding his philosophy, sits brooding over Worcester bathed in sunset.

"The sun, which was just setting behind the distant hills, shone with dazzling splendour for a moment upon the towers and spires of the city across the placid water. Behind this fair vision were dark rain-clouds, before which gloomy background it stood in fairy radiance and light. For a moment it seemed a glorious city bathed in life and hope, full of happy people who thronged its streets and bridge and the margin of its gentle stream. But it was *breve gaudium*. Then the sunset faded, and the ethereal vision vanished, and the landscape lay dark and chill.

"'The sun is set,' Mr. Inglesant said cheerfully, 'but it will rise again. Let us go home.'"

Here was a symbol for Benson. He sought a sun which should not set, and a City on a hill which might

never disappear. Plato's Republic was an "ensample in the sky," the attainment of which might be hazarded by a few, and achieved by fewer still. Hugh would demand that the Word should be made flesh and pitch His tent for evermore amongst us; and that, having taken human nature, He should never again, in any human relationship, lay it aside. But both these spiritual experiences, of the Personality of Jesus, and of the need of His living, infallible voice, speaking Truth in a visionary world, took place in, or disappeared at once into, the deeper places of his consciousness; and, for a while, you might have thought nothing had happened to him at all.

Yet I seem to see, in this else sterile year in London, the sowing of a seed destined to grow into a tree where his whole life will take shelter. Or rather, here is conceived that life itself, to remain unborn yet for a long period.

CHAPTER IV

CAMBRIDGE

A peine dixhuit printemps ont-ils épanoui nos années, que nous souffrons de désirs qui n'ont pour objet ni la chair, ni l'amour, ni la gloire, ni rien qui ait une forme ou un nom. Le jeune homme se sent oppressé d'aspirations sans but: il s'éloigne des réalités de la vie comme d'une prison où le cœur étouffe.

LACORDAIRE.

HUGH BENSON went up to Cambridge in the October of 1890 under very happy auspices. Not only he found, at Trinity, a large circle of Eton acquaintances, but his father and elder brother and more than one of his uncles had been there before him, and it may be said without exaggeration that his lot had fallen to him in a ground exceptionally fair.

Not that the immediate setting in which he found himself was in the least attractive. The name of Trinity is by most associated with its enormous court, irregular in shape and ornament, with its chapel to the right, its canopied fountain perennially pouring slender streams in the midst of the wide pavements, its heavy arches to right and left, and its superb gateway. But Trinity, having outgrown itself, overleaps the road, and there is a melancholy building to the east containing Whewell's Court, where Hugh had rooms. The rooms are in the angle, and their windows give upon All Saints Passage and Bridge Street respectively, gloomy windows, high up, splashed with mud, and, in the interests of conversation, kept for the most part closed. From time to time the bad lighting depressed Hugh, and perhaps he had no heart, as

well as too undeveloped a taste, to trouble about furnishing his rooms fastidiously.

Professor R. Bosanquet, now of Liverpool, whose assistance has been of great value to me in the formation of my mental picture of Hugh during these years, had rooms near his in Whewell's Court, and renewed a friendship inaugurated at Eton the more easily because Hugh, already installed, put his rooms at his friend's disposal until his own effects should be arranged. Hugh struck Mr. Bosanquet as being much developed and older for the months spent in travel and at Wren's since he left Eton; "though to the end his face and manner were those of an impulsive boy." Hugh was still full of his experiences in Switzerland, and was by now winning his friends' attention by his delightful powers of conversation, a special charm he will never lose, but which had remained latent, I need not say, at Eton, though even there a certain volubility and a flexibility of expression belied the orthodox reticence and the mask. Traces, however, of shyness still remained, and only with his more intimate friends would he discuss, with infectious humour, the varied types and characters to be met in a large College. Already he loved to make acquaintances whom he might study, and he led them on, in conversation, to the revealing of some chink in their conventional armour through which his quick imagination might pierce beneath the surface. Nor were his investigations confined to Trinity. By great good fortune he found doors open to him at King's, where his brother, Mr. E. F. Benson, lived in a circle where both dons and undergraduates joined in an intimacy then perhaps less usual than it seems to-day. There were two societies in particular of which Hugh soon found himself a member: one was a King's and Trinity literary society

called the Chit-chat, of which I find no records ;[1] the other was rather more artistic in tendency, and was called the T.A.F. because it met Twice A Fortnight—in fact, each Sunday evening.[2] Its meetings were inaugurated by certain venerable gaieties. The host, Prof. Bosanquet assures me,

"was expected to provide certain traditional cold dishes and a reasonable quantity of hock, and it was an agreeable custom that the guests on their arrival should view the table with melancholy faces and murmur audibly that there seemed to be nothing to eat. Some of the party were excellent actors, and much of the chaff that went on through supper was conducted in the assumed voices of certain well-known characters. Afterwards we adjourned to one of the larger sets of rooms in Fellows' Buildings, as often as not M. R. James's,[3] where there was music and more serious talk, frequently of French cathedrals, illuminated manuscripts, the lives of obscure saints and other mediæval lore. In those years Mr. James was full of the reconstruction of the library and church of the Monastery of St. Edmund at Bury, an intricate piece of research which he published in 1895, and I have no doubt that the talks in which he sketched the life of that great House, familiar to him from boyhood, furnished some of the colour which Hugh was to use so skilfully when he came to write of the mediæval Church."[4]

Other men of note then at King's beside Mr. Montague James, were Marcus Dimsdale, Walter Headlam, and for a time J. K. Stephen, whose unforgettably brilliant career, with its melancholy close, is sympathetically traced by Mr. A. C. Benson in *The Leaves of the Tree.*

[1] Mr. A. C. Benson, indeed, thinks that this society, from which the "Apostles" were largely recruited, was then extinct. It is said to have been highly stimulating. Absolute candour was exacted of all who spoke at it.

[2] This society occurs in Mr. E. F. Benson's story, *The Babe B.A.* I will leave ingenious readers to surmise what traits Hugh Benson supplied to that composite photograph. Or shall I mention one . . .? The Babe could cause a carved piece of orange peel to display, with hideous accuracy, certain episodes proper to a Channel crossing. So could Hugh.

[3] Now Provost. [4] Probably not least in *The King's Achievement.*

At the suggestion of one of the editors, an Etonian, Hugh began to write in the *Trident*, a Trinity magazine, and already, in December 1890, produced a poem there, "From the Heights," an ordinary piece of versification, and rather melancholy. Death, memory, tears, and sunset were the topics of this composition, which was far surpassed in the June of 1891 by "De Profundis," the quite pathetic soliloquy of a dog left chained by his master to the railings of the Pitt Club, at the mercy of the weather and of the messengers who waited there. Much rain, many kicks, hope long deferred, could not quench the terrier's love for the godlike youth who spent heedless hours inside, and rewarded patience with a pat.[1] He wrote a little, too, in the *Cambridge Review*, reviews of books, for instance, notably of his brother Fred's first novel, *Dodo*, though this did not appear till 1893, and created a *succès de surprise*, not least among those who realised how much the circumstances of its writing (it was composed at Cambridge and on the shores of the Gulf of Corinth, in the interstices of time left by the elaboration of a dissertation) gave it the character of a literary *tour de force* as well as of a social bomb.

Hugh, on returning after one vacation, announced that he had read *Dodo* in MS. He was asked what he thought of it. "Well," he replied, "it's very wo-wo-wo-worldly!"

Hugh wrote, too, a long poem in blank verse called "Thor's Hammer," which appeared in the *Leisure Hour*,

[1] In College, where dogs were forbidden, Hugh was one of the few who kept a cat, which, Mr. Marshall says, he called a kitten. The criticism that it was responsible for a certain haunting aroma, he met by flatly denying the alleged fact. Later on, he exclaims in a letter to a friend: "Cats I respect deeply, and have loved several: a white one with a sandy tail and an abscess in its ear; an ash-coloured Persian with orange eyes and hairy ears and toes;" and actually wrote to a sick penitent: "I am so sorry about the pain you are suffering, but am delighted that the cat is a bright spot." See Vol. II, p. 148.

and another poem called "Iduna," which I cannot find. Tennyson, I should say, influenced their style; a story written in conjunction with his sister, which earned him £6, 10s., in February 1891, from the *Monthly Packet* will have been more original.

More than this, he wrote a satiric poem, in the style of Pope, entitled, "A Scandal in High Life," dealing with some undergraduate freak of insubordination. The men involved were youths of destined importance in their country, and resented the sarcasm. Inquiry failed, however, to discover the author.

He and Mr. Marshall shared their literary ambitions,

or rather, thought that it would be nice to write stories and get money for them. We did write a joint one, and I have the manuscript somewhere still. It was a very poor story, but contained a few gleams of observation. It must have been a year or so after this that Hugh finished a novel, and it was a very bad novel, ending up with the violent death of all the chief characters. I said that this scene was not led up to in any way, and therefore missed fire. Hugh said that it was a very effective scene, and therefore couldn't miss fire. But the novel was never published. Looking back, it seems to me that both of us showed exceptionally small promise in those days of ever doing anything with fiction. I think that Hugh's first impulse came from the necessity that it was for him always to be doing something with a pen. Later on, he plunged deeply into life, and his craftsmanship fitted itself to his knowledge.[1]

Already, however, an ingenious story-teller (he always recast the plots of the books he read), he used to beguile long walks by a system which he will still make use of when in Rome. He would start a story, develop it with extreme rapidity for a certain number of minutes, break off abruptly, and leave his companion to continue it. He

[1] *The Cornhill Magazine*, Feb. 1915.

loved, moreover, improvised acting, though he never played a part more serious than that of a member of the chorus in the *Ion* of Euripides.[1] Mr. A. C. Benson says that he was a keen debater (the debating club was called the Decemviri), but I cannot find his name down as speaking (and only once, I think, as present) at the College debates, in so far, at least, as I have found their records, for these years, in the *Trident*. Not that this implied, as you may well imagine, that he was slack in the defence of his own view. But even then, his debates tended ever towards the intolerant; the rival argument must be interrupted; the thesis must be started from a dogma.

"I can see him," writes Mr. Ronald Norman, a close friend of Hugh's, "in his rooms in the Great Court at Trinity, plucking ceaselessly at his chin with fingers stained with (too much) cigarette-smoking, as he strove with his stammer to break into an argument which was going against his views, and now and then exploding into a short laugh."

As for athletics, "he steered the third Trinity boat all the time he was at Cambridge, and was a member of the Leander Club, and displayed no symptoms of nerves." At golf, other freshmen found him to be an expert. He played for some time regularly on the Coldham Common, railed furiously at the background of drab brick houses which made it impossible, he urged, to play golf in the proper spirit. . . . Not just the game, it will be surmised, was paramount in this artist's unconcentrated thought. Still, golf had a value wider than itself.

"Allow me to congratulate you," a friend wrote in May 1891, "on the fact that you have at last succeeded in

[1] It was in 1892 that he played the rôle of a retired tradesman's daughter in a charade, *Coventry*, of which quaint drawings still remain in a little note-book.

addressing a letter to me quite correctly—no mean achievement for an erratic-minded literary man! Secondly, allow me to congratulate you on the fact that your latest craze is a healthy and sporting one, which has my sympathies more than mesmerising."

Of this latter pursuit I speak more at length below. Besides this, we hear that in the summer of 1892 he was much on the Upper River, an inexhaustibly talkative companion in long canoe expeditions, and a furious and rather reckless performer in a variety of water polo then popular at Trinity, which was played in canoes, and always ended in the whole of both teams being upset into the water.

In this connection there is little else to mention save his love of walking, which led him quite far afield—to Ely, for instance, and Saffron Walden. His brother has related[1] how he and Hugh, one winter, went for a walking tour in Yorkshire, in pursuit of the "origins" of the Benson family. They went from Pately Bridge by way of Ripon, Bolton Abbey, and Ripley to York, "the thermometer falling lower and lower every day in sympathy with (their) researches." For though they traced their family tree back to the fourteenth century, they considered the earlier estate of their ancestors too undistinguished to provoke enthusiasm. However, Hugh wrote to his father at considerable length on the subject. He would climb, too, with his brothers, in Switzerland, and was found by them to be "agile, quick, sure-footed, and entirely intrepid." A really serious accident was experienced by them near Pontresina, without a single member of the party having broken the silence by so much as an exclamation . . . and once, on the Piz Palù

[1] In *Hugh*, p. 62.

in the Engadine, Hugh's heart suffered a sharp attack after a long climb from midnight to 8 o'clock. Reduced as he was by training in order to steer his boat at Cambridge, he did not revive when dosed with brandy, and his brother believed him dead. To all appearances unconscious, his soul was in reality perfectly aware. He thought himself, no doubt, dying, and speculated on what phenomenon of the supernatural would first meet his gaze. The snowy peaks suggested the Great White Throne. . . . Yet neither fear nor hope, nor other emotion, kindled his soul. He assigns this, in his *Confessions*, to the general atrophy of his religious sense at that time. I doubt this explanation. In most cases where the senses have been numbed, but consciousness of some deep sort has survived, the patient, on recovery, speaks of the lack of interest with which he has contemplated the events occurring to or round his person, and the seemingly alien character assumed by his body, and even by his more superficially spiritual faculties. This apparent disintegration of the personality and loss of interest in one of its parts by the other, does not seem connected with modes of previous behaviour.

His walking efforts culminated in a tramp which he attempted from Cambridge to London. Its incidents were sufficiently characteristic to warrant my quoting at some length from a letter of Professor Bosanquet, his companion:

About this time some of our friends revived what had once been a common practice, and walked up to London. I was somewhat surprised when Hugh told me, one day towards the end of the term, that he intended to do the same, and named a day. I knew that he was good for twenty miles, but this was a matter of fifty or more, and the time was too short for training. Some one else was

to have gone with him, but the arrangement fell through, and almost at the last moment I agreed to go with him and stay the night at Lambeth, though I doubted whether either of us could stay the distance. He was tremendously in earnest, and I think excitement kept him awake most of the previous night. I remember his keen enjoyment of the early breakfast, which we cooked ourselves, and his confidence, which no warnings could shake, in a pair of Alpine boots by a noted maker, which were to carry him in triumph to Lambeth. We were off at five, had a second breakfast at Royston, and all went well until we halted for lunch in a village whose name I have long forgotten. I can still see the sanded tap-room where Hugh removed one of his boots and disclosed a galled heel, and the elderly tramp, our fellow-guest, who prescribed a pad of brown paper and fitted it himself. The Alpine boots were our undoing. After another two hours Hugh was going really lame, but it never occurred to him to give in. Somewhere south of Ware I persuaded him to take my arm, and he stumped along, still perfectly cheerful, buoyed up by the increasing number of houses and gas lamps which deceitfully suggested that we were nearing the outskirts of London. We were only at the tip of one of those tentacle suburbs which fringe the main roads for many miles before real town begins. The pace became slower, and I had to get him some brandy, and then decided that if he attempted more he might make himself really ill. Beaten in body, but still unbroken in spirit, he was persuaded to get into the train at a station called Ponders End, and slept all the way to Liverpool Street. We had sent our bags on to Lambeth, and had a very kind welcome when we arrived there late at night. Hugh was able to dissemble his lameness, and the Archbishop's principal concern was for the levity with which we had passed a series of interesting churches without pausing to study their architecture. His surprise is recorded in his published diary.

That was the first of several visits which showed me something of the bracing atmosphere in which Hugh had grown up.

Neither the climbing nor the tramp to London were forgotten by Hugh Benson, or left unused, when he began to draw upon his experience for his work. The Alpine

scenery, observed, so to say, from above, is introduced with superb realism into *The Lord of the World*, and the mechanical technicalities, no less than the more psychological concomitants of a climb, into the *Coward*. As for the tramp, it is worked, with much accuracy of detail, into the novel, which introduces, too, no little of Cambridge background, and even of Trinity itself, *None Other Gods*. There it is Guiseley who takes to the unaccustomed road, and it is Guiseley's foot that suffers; and the suffering is as magnified as the tramp.

Hugh was led to King's by yet another influence. He resented strongly the lack of music upon most week-days in Trinity, having been used for years to the inspiring daily service of Eton. It is true that he enjoyed to the full what he called "square shouting hymns," sung by the whole congregation; but he appreciated already a better music, and in most of his letters to the Archbishop occurs the name of the anthem he last had heard. With Mr. Crabtree, now of Sunningdale, one of the very few among his earlier acquaintances with whom I can discover Hugh to have kept up any kind of correspondence, he used to spend much time in various organ lofts, at Cambridge, or at Lambeth. Hugh even travelled after music as far as Ely. His performances were not wonderful, but they witnessed to a remarkable natural instinct, as I shall indicate below. When, after the lapse of many years, Mr. Crabtree called on Hugh at Hare Street, he was at first taken for the tax-collector. Hugh, when he recognised his identity, became charming, and for the last time the friends played together on Hugh's little American organ. But, rather as his golf suffered from unkind surroundings, so did his music. The chapel at Trinity was decorated at an unfortunate moment, and he fled from

its heavy gilded carvings to the soaring architecture of King's. Eton had been but a preliminary hint of all this splendour. Even so, he needed a touch of the dramatic. In the evening, the ante-chapel, where he sat, was almost wholly dark, and the great loft and organ were silhouetted against the radiance streaming upward from the choir. From this side and from that, processions entered, meeting in the middle. Doors opened and then shut; curtains were drawn; the white-robed ministers had passed into the unseen melodious "Paradise," and Hugh remained ecstatically in the dark. Trained by Lis Escop, Lambeth, Eton, and King's, he will never quite tolerate a roodless chapel, and in the tiny shrine at Hare Street, he will re-establish the division; only there, it will be he who will kneel, half seen, inside the rood.

A visit made by him to Bayreuth, some months later on, is instructive here. He was asked by some friends to accompany them to a Wagner festival there, and wrote enthusiastically to thank his father for allowing him to accept:

I am so very grateful to you for allowing me to go to Bayreuth and for your long letter—I shall enjoy the opera most *enormously*—in its literal sense—I have never yet heard one.[1]

He arrived after a fatiguing journey, of which crude reminiscences survive in his sketch-book, and went straight that afternoon to *Parsifal*.[2] But what remains with him

[1] From more than this one instance I gather that the Archbishop, to whom Hugh wrote letters of a somewhat propitiatory character, had been fond of insisting on the exact etymological value of the word *enormous*.

[2] If he kept to his original programme of hearing five operas only, he can never have assisted at the Ring, at anyrate in its entirety; for he certainly heard *Tannhäuser* and the *Meistersinger*, and perhaps (since he chooses them for description in *Loneliness*) *Tristan* and *Lohengrin*.

of this opera (the only one he dwells on in his letters), is in the main an ecclesiastical stage effect.[1]

"We arrived here yesterday," he wrote to his father, "and went to *Parsifal* in the afternoon. I have never been so moved by music in all my life—it was absolutely glorious. Do you know the story? In the last act all comes right, and there is a final 'Love Feast' of the knights. Parsifal lifts the Grail and the Spear, which grow redder and redder, and all the knights hide their heads while the Dove descends from the dome, where one hears a choir singing the Grail Motive, the Dresden Amen. I have never seen anything like it in all my life—it is really the most magnificent thing I have ever seen. I am so very grateful to you for letting me go."

To Professor Bosanquet he writes in almost identical words, and then proceeds:

The heat at this place is something more frantic than you can have any conception of. One regularly has two cold baths every day—one in the morning and one before the opera, besides a permanent hot bath all the time. The S——s are most delightful people to travel with, with proper ideas of comfort—such as sitting in about one garment and a half and smoking all the time, also many bibbings of iced liquor and large meals under awnings—at all hours of the day.

We stayed at Ratisbon on Sunday last and went to the Cathedral there — gorgeous[2] Gregorian services and ceremonies.

I must stop—the charred pen is falling from limp fingers, and I am sitting with my feet in warm water, part of myself.—Ever yours, HUGH BENSON.

Whether he became, ultimately, at home in the tumultuous universe of Wagner, we may perhaps have an opportunity of judging later on.

[1] I am interested to find, after writing this, that he declared, quite late in life, that he could make nothing of *Parsifal*: as music, it was quite "above" him.

[2] "Gorgeous," a correspondent of that date has written to me, "was a favourite word of his."

Music lifted him above mere matter. Quite early in his Cambridge career he turned with zest to spiritualism, still, however, more as a sport than out of any real psychical necessity.

"In his early undergraduate days," a close friend of his has written to me, "he got two rustics into his rooms and proceeded to hypnotise them one after the other, telling each in turn before he was roused that he was not to remember what had happened; and he afterwards thoroughly enjoyed the laugh each had at the other. But the matter came, I believe, to the ears of the authorities, who prohibited the further indulgence in this taste. I recollect that once in the Long, when he was going off after Hall one night with three others to 'read' in the rooms of one (I am afraid on most occasions the reading did not last very long), the conversation happened to turn on crystal-gazing, and nothing would satisfy him but that we should all four stand in different corners of the room gazing into a glass of water (the nearest approach to a crystal that could be improvised) until, greatly to Hugh's disgust, a loud laugh from one of the party put an end to the performance. I also recollect one afternoon in a May week his insisting, after lunch in his room, on darkening the room and our sitting with our hands on the table waiting developments, and his indignation when the inevitable happened, and some of us set to work to get the table going."

"I was present," writes Professor Bosanquet, "at one of these thought-reading performances; so far as I can remember, half a dozen of us in one room were told to focus our thoughts on the weather-cock of the University Church, and after a time the medium, in the next room, was aware of a cow perched on a steeple. He read some of the older magical literature and was interested in Dr. Dee, an early fellow of the College; but I cannot be sure whether an article on Dee's occult experiences, which appeared in the *Trident*, the College magazine, for December 1891, was Hugh's own work or some one else's."[1]

[1] I gather it was not Hugh's.

He told his mother about this, and she of her greater experience earnestly dissuaded him from making further practical experiments:

LAMBETH PALACE,
Feb. 17, 1891.

Oh, please don't go playing tricks with hypnotism. (And I said *Oh, please!*) It is a deadly thing, and ought, I am sure, to be taken up scientifically or not at all. And for goodness gracious sake, not *now*, when your work is so important. It is *very* exhausting—I know this in so many ways. Tries nerves and exhausts brain. *Do* leave it alone for the present. It's quite a question of "afterwards" and as much eye-winking as ever you can do.

LAMBETH PALACE,
March 20, 1891.

About mesmerism. . . . I still feel strongly that at present it isn't *the time* for you to follow out a subject so engrossing as one of this kind is—and I shouldn't feel happy at your doing it without talking it out with your father. . . .

It would be difficult to deny that there was a touch at least of morbidity in his instinct for the occult.

It is in a letter to his father that we first find the casual mention, inserted between quite alien topics, of an event which left a practical effect on his stay at Cambridge.

June 1.

I am getting on well in my work, I think—Dr. Verrall tells me I am making progress. I am reading the *De Coronâ* with my Coach—I do not find it so hard as I expected.

An awful thing happened in Trinity last night—a man shot himself, apparently from overwork at night, and was found dead yesterday morning by some one whom he had asked to breakfast.

To convince his father, perhaps, that he was not morbidly affected by this event, he added some sentences on everyday topics, so callous-sounding that I omit them. He was not callous, but, certainly, unawakened; and when no one would take the suicide's rooms, which were in Bishop's Hostel, again outside Great Court, Hugh im-

mediately applied for them, to the anger of several of his friends, and slept for some time in a room where a bloodstain marked the boards and a bullet had pierced the panel. He sincerely hoped to enter into some sort of communication with the soul who there had made the tremendous choice, and had preferred to have done with life.

By 1893 his interest in the less trodden among spiritual paths has passed from occultism to mysticism, and he was plunged in Swedenborg.

He informed his father of this new interest, and the Archbishop, with true respect of freedom, tolerated and even furthered it.

"I have been reading," Hugh wrote, "some more of Swedenborg's books. A great deal of them is extraordinarily clever; but one of the things that I cannot believe is that he denies the immortality of animals."

The Archbishop lent him two books on Swedenborg, which he handed on to his sister Maggie—Hugh was at this time ill, and not allowed to get up, and excuses his "extraordinarily dull and short" letter by the fact that he has "nothing to describe or write about."

All these pursuits, however, were merely incidental to, or at best by-products of his way of life. To begin with, indeed, it looked as if that life were to be even less purposeful than that of Eton. True, he was observed to "walk fast" and "always to look busy"; but when his brother asked him what he did in that dark room in Whewell's Court, he answered, "Heaven knows! As far as I can remember, I mostly sat up late at night and played cards." Though it is true that he was never in a gambling set properly so called, he spent, Mr. Arthur Benson recalls, a good deal of money, and though his allowance was generous, a financial crisis concluded his first year, and

his mother paid his debts. He had entertained a great deal, and the Trinity kitchen was, I understand, at that time expensive. From time to time, however, he violently economised.

Too much that is characteristic (I do not say of Hugh only) would be lost if I refrained from requoting a letter from the Archbishop to his son, already to be found in *Hugh:*

ADDINGTON PARK, CROYDON,
26th January 1891.

DEAREST HUGHIE,—I was rather disturbed to hear that you imagined that what I said in October about not needlessly indulging was held by you to forbid your having a fire in your bedroom on the ground floor in the depth of such a winter as we have had!

You ought to have a fire lighted at such a season at eight o'clock, so as to warm and dry the room and all in it, nearly every evening; and whenever the room seems damp, have a fire just lighted to go out when it will. It's not wholesome to sleep in heated rooms, but they must be dry. A bed slept in every night keeps so, if the room is not damp; but the room must not be damp, and when it is unoccupied for two or three days, it is sure to get so.

Be sure that there is a good fire in it all day, and all your bed things, mattress and all, kept well before it for at least a whole day before you go back from Uncle Henry's.

How was it your bed-maker had not your room well warmed and dried, mattress dry, &c., before you went up this time? She ought to have had, and should be spoken to about it—*i.e.* unless you told her not to! in which case it would be very like having no breakfast!

It has been a horrid interruption in the beginning of term—and you'll have difficulty with the loss of time. Besides which I have no doubt you have been very uncomfortable.

But I don't understand why you should have "nothing to write about" because you have been in bed. Surely you must have accumulated all sorts of reflective and imaginative stories there.

It is most kind of Aunt Nora and Uncle Henry—give my love and thanks to both.

I grieve to say that many more fish are found dead since the thaw melted the banks of swept snow off the sides of the ice. It is most piteous; the poor things seem to have come to the edge where the water is shallowest—there is a shoal where we generally feed the swans.

I am happy to say the goldfish seem all alive and merry. The continual dropping of fresh water has no doubt saved them—they were never hermetically sealed in like the other poor things.

Yesterday I was at Ringwould, near Dover. The farmers had been up all night saving their cattle in the stalls from the sudden floods.

Here we have not had any, though the earth is washed very much from the hills in streaks.

We are—at least I am—dreadfully sorry to go to London; though the house is very dull without "the boys."

All right about the books.—Ever your loving father,

EDW. CANTUAR.

The first shock to his easy-going existence occurred quite early in his stay at Cambridge. It was the death of his elder sister Nellie. It occurred in October 1890, of diphtheria; and Mr. A. C. Benson has written, in a preface to her novel, *At Sundry Times and in Divers Manners*, of her communicative personality and her devotion to human needs in Lambeth.[1] She too, it may be gathered, had that readiness for self-oblation so strangely mingled with a marked need of literary self-expression which in Hugh took its peculiar but very developed form. It may be rare that the apostle and the artist are united in one personality. Yet this too the Archbishop handed down. The last reports from Addington had been good, and thus intensified the shock.

"On Sunday night," Professor Bosanquet wrote to his father at the time, "the T.A.F. met in Benson's rooms, and both the brothers seemed very cheerful; then on

[1] The Archbishop also wrote a memoir in her book, *Streets and Lanes of the City*, which was privately printed.

Monday morning came the telegram, 'much worse,' and I walked with Hugh to King's to find his brother, and they went, only to find that she had died. I heard from Hugh this morning. It is a terrible blow—she was so strong and so clever." "When he returned" (he adds), "one saw that his world had grown dark. He spoke more freely of his family and home life, and revealed a most tender and affectionate nature. Hard hit as he was, he said that his wound was light in comparison with his elders, and spoke especially of his brother Arthur—she was nearest to him in age."

Professor Bosanquet undoubtedly regards Hugh's character as having been, if not altered, at least somewhat developed by this grave shock. I should like to believe that it was so. It would be pleasant to see in Hugh, too, something of a Parsifal, *durch Mitleid wissend.* Even though the first sorrow seems to sink beneath the surface of the soul and vanish, yet in the recesses of subconsciousness it survives and is operative.[1] It is, however, wholly true that Hugh very rarely indeed looked backwards: he never brooded; lingering melancholy was alien to his temperament. Again, too, and again we shall have to emphasize that singular layer of hardness which crossed his character, which he so often vehemently recognised, and which some of his admirers so hotly controvert.

Be that as it may, about half-way through his time at Cambridge, or even earlier, he definitely turned his attention from classics to theology in view of possible ordination.

"It is quite true," he wrote in a letter, unfortunately undated, to his elder brother, "about the theology, and I feel almost certain that I shall take orders. I think it is a thing about which one cannot possibly make up one's mind until a comparatively long time has passed, and one is still therefore of the same opinion; but I feel as certain as possible so far.

[1] Himself, Hugh thought that his mind was perhaps turned by this death towards ordination.

"I like the work far better than the classics, about which I was never really keen. I had such an enormous quantity of ground to pick up, and it was altogether unsatisfactory.

"Papa suggested it to me just before I went back to Cambridge, but as you know, I had been thinking of it for some time previously—for about a year, in fact. . . . I have no cigarette case, and I think I should like it above everything."

It is quite true that his success in classics was not marked. One translation paper of his which survives provoked ferocious recriminations:

"One might fancy," wrote the angry examiner, "you had never heard of Tiberius. This is a *very* bad mistake; you see you do not stop to consider at all *how* your translation is to come out of the words. You *must* be more careful if you are to get on."

Certainly Hugh's slapdash method was peculiarly suited to annoy a scholarly-minded professor.

Still, even when he had shifted his rooms to those in the Great Court, he was still working under Dr. Verrall, who, if anyone, should have been able to fire the imagination, and even the fancifulness, of his pupil had the classics ever been destined to mean anything to him. He writes to his father, with that odd boylike tone which will cling to him in his correspondence with the Archbishop, even after he has left the University:

Dr. Verrall has given me some very nice rooms in the Great Court—they are panelled and are on the ground floor —Letter I. Facing the Hall. They are on the Lecture Room staircase, which is a slight drawback, though not nearly as much as I had thought. It makes it entirely necessary to keep sported all the morning, as otherwise one would be so disturbed by men going to and from Lectures. I thanked Dr. Verrall very much for his trouble.

In October 1891, then, he begins Theology, and is rather startled at having to undertake Hebrew; but proposes to "do Hebrew more than anything" that term. He also goes to lectures on the Epistle to the Romans, and to Professor Gwatkin's on Church History. He enjoys this a great deal more than classics, and repeatedly emphasizes this point. He also undertakes the Third Book of Eusebius and Textual Criticism and New Testament Grammar, and his father sends him an Analysis of St. Mark. And in July, 1892, he is reading Essays upon the Synoptic Gospels, and writes: "Might I have the book you said you would lend me? I should be very grateful for it." In his next letter he says: "Many thanks also for the book on Roman Catholicism, which has arrived; it is most complete in dealing with the difficulties of which I spoke to you."

It is interesting to find that this was Dr. Littledale's rather scandalous book called *Plain Reasons against Joining the Church of Rome*, to which at that period those disturbed in their minds by Roman tendencies were regularly treated. It had not yet been realised how grotesque and worse many of its pages are. Later, Hugh's life at Mirfield was harassed by the duty of constantly refuting its arguments in order to relieve those of his Anglican penitents who found that it struck, not only at the special position of Rome, but at all they themselves were determined to continue believing and practising, as well as at Dr. Littledale's own creed and method. At present Hugh has indeed a Roman Catholic for friend, but considers his position necessarily absurd. He has another friend, whom he regards (perhaps unfairly) as an atheist, who announces that if Christ's life be in any way to be believed, Roman Catholicism is the only conceivable scheme into which it can be fitted. This annoyed, without influencing Hugh.

I think it was to this friend that he stoutly maintained that there was no real difference between the intellectual position of an atheist and that of an agnostic. On being reminded of this in later years, he will deny that he could ever possibly have supported such a theory.

"I feel great horror," he begins in another letter, "at not having written more"; and continues: "Have you read *The New Gospel of Peter?* Don't you think it a rather feeble idea, that of the necessity of the angels to bring our Lord from the tomb? It throws the energy in the wrong place.

"The authorities do not seem to agree as to its tendency, docetic or otherwise. Dr. Sinker says it is entirely orthodox; while Montie James says that it is most certainly docetic.

"What is one to say in the Tripos?"

Observe, then, the purely ascetical interest he feels in what he reads. As for the critical aspect, he leaves it, with much sang-froid, to the authorities. All he asks is the proper thing to say in the examination.

Did he feel it necessary to alter his plan of life at all, in view of his probable ordination? I doubt it. It is true that he finds that he has hitherto taken no interest in the Trinity College Mission, and entertains three of its representatives to lunch. Beyond this I find no explicit reference to religion in these letters, though one quaint paragraph reveals that Rome was not yet exercising over his attention more than the spell which is cast by an object one dislikes.

"Great indignation," he writes on July 24, 1893, "prevails at Cambridge owing to the privileges accorded to the Extensionists, to whom the Senate House and the Union are thrown open. And there is one further thing—in the map of Cambridge printed specially for them, and drawn out by an apparently competent committee, the Roman Church is marked as the 'Catholic Church.'

This has been already drawn attention to in the *Cambridge Review*—with a rhetorical question as to whether this is the kind of learning *extended* to them—which is good."

If it has been suggested that his attitude towards his father was one of mainly exterior deference, his treatment of the suggestion of a travelling tutorship, to follow his going down from Cambridge, seems to modify this. The Archbishop did not like the idea, though he would not veto it. Hugh writes to Mr. A. C. Benson that when he told the Archbishop he would not accept it:

I think he was pleased. We parted on the very best of terms. I am sorry it should have raised such an intense, and apparently unreasonable, opposition in those quarters, but I think it is all smoothed over. . . . As you say, without his *approval* the thing would have been disgraceful—but it was his *approval* I was trying to get. I practically had his *consent* from the first, but an unwilling one, and I felt that it was not sufficient.

He made, in consequence, arrangements with Dean Vaughan of Llandaff to spend some months with him, previous to ordination, from September onwards.

Only the Tripos itself was left to distract his last days at Cambridge. Amusing tales survive of the panic to which its approach reduced him. Mr. Crabtree remembers him pacing frantically up and down his room, "in an awful state because he was only going to get a Third." "My father, all my uncles, all my brothers—*all—all—all* got Firsts, and here am I going to get a Third"; while Mr. Norman remembers a yet earlier stage of despair, when Hugh, furious that he was to be "the only Eton Colleger who ever got ploughed," tried by the help of a diet of green tea (drunk, and at least once smoked), "to acquire the learning of the ages in a few months."

As a matter of fact, it was a Third which befell him, and he forthwith wrote to the Archbishop:

> I cannot say that I am exactly disappointed about the Tripos. It is annoying in one way, but in another it is satisfactory; there is a certain grim satisfaction in the fact that nineteen people failed to get through, while twenty-seven passed.

The line Hugh Benson was following was that, he afterwards came to feel, of least resistance. He certainly did not calculate on the help his father's position would be to him in a clerical career; it was natural, however, that he, at any rate, should follow his father's "profession," and he was not a little drawn by the consciousness that he would win his father's highly-prized approval to a degree most pleasant to his soul, still somewhat filially afraid. Of marriage he loathed the thought, from congenital instinct, unless I err, and perhaps more significantly so than if this abhorrence had been merely the result of ascetical speculation. He foresaw as the one religious life possible, that of a quiet country clergyman, with a beautiful garden, an exquisite choir, and a sober, bachelor existence.[1] Or so he came to think. At the time, he heard echoes of a more positive calling, and confided to his mother, one Sunday night in the silent park of Addington, on their way home from Evensong, that he had answered, "Here am I, send me." A ring, graven with these words, and for many years worn by Hugh, will perpetuate this impressive experience.[2] Even in 1891,

[1] He visited Sundridge Rectory, and decided that that delightful place might suit him. "But what I should really like," he exclaimed, "is to be a Cardinal."

[2] A year or two later, when he receives it, he will write: "I liked the motto extremely—and also very much like the system of writing it inside the ring. It is nearer than on the outside." Oddly, he speaks as if the motto seemed to him, by now, wholly his mother's choice.

his father had been praying that Hugh might "hear the Calling Voice."

Therefore Hugh Benson left Cambridge, having aroused there his intellect, and struck out into a carefully restricted area of experience, but with his heart as yet but half-awakened. Impulsive courage, restless curiosity, but also ready obedience to the commands which a discreet convention, spiritual and temporal, recognised, were his; but not yet any biting self-denial, any really root-temptation wrestled with and overcome, nor much shutting of the outer eyes for the sake of interior vigilance and true spiritual awareness: an apparent ease in the neglect of the baser calls of sense, but no profound detachment from the feeling of self-sufficiency engendered by culture, conscious or unconscious. At best he was putting no obstacle to the call to other worlds of ideal and effort; he was moving towards an existence as yet unguessed, super-natural, fourth dimensional, food for a sixth sense, but always by the path of ordered pieties and decorum undefied; the freaks of life were by him circumscribed, and confined to the domains where trivialities may be safely given play. His life had, at Cambridge, been enriched, but not sated: *Ecquando amabis?* The good he had gained had but made him more capable of recognising and responding to the summons of a better.

CHAPTER V

ORDINATION: THE ETON MISSION

September 1893–October 1896

Next to a sound rule of faith, there is nothing of so much consequence as a sober standard of feeling in matters of practical religion; and it is the peculiar happiness of the Church of England to possess, in her authorised formularies, an ample and secure provision for both. . . .

What if our English air be stirred
With sighs from saintly bosoms heard,
Or penitents, to leaning angels dear,
"Our own, our only Mother is not here?"

J. Keble: from the Preface to *The Christian Year*, and *Mother out of Sight*.

From Cambridge, then, Hugh went, in September 1893, to read for orders under Dean Vaughan at Llandaff. Of no period in his life have I found it so difficult to form a satisfactory picture. Perhaps that is not astonishing. The life itself was rather featureless, its dominant note being the personality of the Dean himself. And this, for one who never knew him personally, may defy capture, even, and still less may be conveyed in written paragraphs. But it is quite certain that when Mr. Archibald Marshall, in an article on his close friend Hugh Benson, in the *Cornhill Magazine* for February 1915, speaks of his beautiful spirit with which, rather than with any stamp of ecclesiastical mark, Vaughan impressed his men, he is not yielding to sentimental enthusiasm. The great portrait of the Dean, in the Vaughan Library at Harrow (he had been Headmaster there), does not wholly fail to convey that mingled impression of sweetness and calm. Benson speaks of his

"extraordinary charm of personality," and of his "high spirituality," of his remarkable preaching — his sermons were written out laboriously in an English which was "simply perfect, comparable only, I think, to that of Ruskin and Newman." There is a hint that his pliable and pointed voice, and his special sort of magnetism, reached but his more "educated hearers"; but them it affected "like a strain of music." To his serene faith and intense love of the Person of Our Lord the most dogmatically-minded of his hearers succumbed, and then ceased to quarrel with his liberal evangelicism.[1]

As a foil, almost, to the gracious piety and austere learning of Dean Vaughan, was to be found his wife, a member of the Stanley clan, theologically so alert, exploring, and independent; she was, in fact, a sister of the famous Dean. Like Queen Victoria in feature, she was, too, witty, versatile to a high degree, and refreshingly unconventional. Hugh's dim-tinted, harmless life, as he lived it at Llandaff, was flecked with high lights by her brilliant presence. Whimsical anecdotes are to be found concerning this lady, which it would have been a pleasure to transport from their proper setting into the memoir of Hugh Benson.

The "post-graduate theological college" which the Dean maintained was on the whole informal, and its life was free. The men lived in rooms near the Deanery, and the Dean directed their reading rather than controlled details of education.

"I find," Hugh wrote immediately upon arrival, "that there is a great deal to do here—I have got two sermons to

[1] Dean Vaughan reciprocated Hugh's attachment. "Give the Archbishop," he once wrote, "my dutiful love, and thank him for all his kindness, and especially for the loan to me of his son—*whom I love.*" "This I record," the Archbishop adds in his diary, "for dear Hugh's sake."

preach this term—and a service to take, and several Lessons to read; I have just had a district given me, which I am going to begin on to-morrow. I am told by some people here that the visiting is not really much good, because the people never will listen to a layman, and they always expect money, and are rather spoilt. I shall try this term though, and see how I get on."

He is still troubled with this topic of sick-visiting in the November of 1894.

Nov. 16, 1894.

I have been reading a very good book on Catechising by Bishop Dupanloup. Have you read it? I believe he is the Roman Bishop of Orleans.

He has also, he proceeds, been reading Hooker, Book V, but can find no satisfactory work on Pastoral Theology. Gibson's Lectures and a book by Dr. Moule deal chiefly with "the way the clergyman should himself live at home." *The Priest's Inner Life*, by Liddon, does not deal with visiting.

These things, after all, are not to be learnt out of books, and if instinct, or a predominant sense of duty, does not make the pastoral function an integral part of a priest's existence, it may be doubted whether he will ever succeed in that particular department. To the end you will find that Hugh proclaims, and truly, that he has no pastoral soul.

"Poor people," he sums up, after a long description of a visit to a sick boy (whose pain and patience had much impressed him), "poor people are so dreadfully funny about everything."

However, he was to have a suitable amount of practice in this part, too, of possible ministerial duty.

"*Sept.* 28, 1892 [*i.e.* 1893].

"I have just been appointed to the 'Bishopric' of Pontcanna. It is always in the charge of one of us, who is

called the 'Bishop,' and it means preaching every other Sunday and reading the service on the other Sundays.

"I have just had a letter from Sinclair Donaldson," he adds, "asking me if I should like to come to the Eton Mission when I am ordained.

"I think I should like it more than anything else. It is an ideal thing, I think, to work in the Mission of one's old school, particularly with such a man as Sinclair Donaldson.

"What do you think about it? I have written to him to thank him and to say that I have written to you."

From the bundle of letters, still surviving among the late Archbishop's papers, I can remember constant allusions to football matches (he played half-back for some club against Cardiff); to a boys' class at Pontcanna, where the boys proved restive after a time and had to be evicted; and to a few "cases" among the poorer folk which claimed pecuniary aid or institutional intervention. Dr. Barnardo's name, and the like, flicker briefly across the pages. He is faithful, too, in sending some proportion of the weekly sermons he wrote for the Dean home to his father or his sister Maggie, to have them corrected, and in giving his father a fairly complete list (I suppose) of the books he was reading with the Dean. When he found them tedious he said so frankly; sometimes he was carried away, and even in these letters, dutiful, and at times almost deprecatory, and often downright school-boyish in their phrasing, something of Hugh's impetuous generalisations flashes forth.

"I have been reading," he tells the Archbishop, "Hammond's book, *English Nonconformity and Christ's Christianity;* it is a splendid book, and, it seems to me, entirely conclusive. My only wonder is that there are any reasonable Nonconformists any more in existence."

This firm adherence to Church of England orthodoxy gains, at this time, a slightly more ecclesiastical tinge, due to a particular acquaintance, he tells us, and to a revival of

the influence of *John Inglesant.* He begins to "prefer" Communion before breakfast. He enters upon the dream, never wholly to leave him, of setting up some community or other like that of Nicholas Ferrar at Little Gidding. He visits a few houses, even, which he fancies suitable for this; but the idea remained a floating one.

In the summer of 1894 he asked and obtained his father's permission to go to Switzerland, fixing on the Riffel Alp, which he already knew as an ideal destination. His father, however, planned out a different tour which in itself sounds delightful; but "what I had been very anxious to do was to go to the Riffel and do glacier-walking and Riffel Horn climbing, and one big peak." It cannot, Hugh urges, injure his health—he has had lately a great deal of exercise in the way of "hare and hounds," such as six miles in three-quarters of an hour; and his doctor considers that he has grown much stronger than he expected, and has by no means "remained abnormally undeveloped." He enters into considerable detail with regard to economy, though indeed, at this period, he has to own that his allowance never quite covers his expenses.

"I heard from Mama," he concludes, "this morning, that I might go anywhere in Switzerland. I think I should prefer the Riffel to any other place. If the Riffelberg is any cheaper, I am thinking of going there—it is higher, for one thing.

"I am so very grateful to you for allowing me to go to Switzerland—and more especially for allowing me to choose my place. I shall enjoy it enormously."

The time passed rapidly, on the whole, and he found himself on the eve of the Universities Preliminary examination. I find myself entirely unable to become clear as to its theological nature. Doubtless his very unsystematic course of reading included some "set books" at anyrate,

and I expect a certain outline of Church history, and perhaps some elementary patristic work and a good deal of semi-devotional literature. Anyhow, in this examination he got a First, and wrote to his father:

Thank you very much for your congratulatory telegram. I am delightfully surprised. I had terrible dreams last night about it—six altogether—in two of them I got Firsts, in three a Third, and in one I failed. It is a long time, the Dean said this morning, since any of us have gone in for that examination and got a First.

Dean Vaughan wished the candidates for ordination to spend the few days immediately preceding that ceremony at Llandaff. Hugh, however, had different plans.

I have been thinking about what I said to you about retiring before my ordination. I think that Llandaff is a splendid place for the *preceding year*—but somehow not suitable for the six or seven weeks [or, *days ?*] *just* before. I should like, if possible, to be *absolutely* alone—I mean without any servants—and to be in a place where I should not meet people *at all*—I could do all necessary things in the way of meals and sleeping for myself. I do feel that I want to be entirely alone. You propose St. David's. I should think that that would be delightful in every way—if there was any place a few miles out where I could be entirely alone. I could go in on Sunday to St. David's, and receive the Holy Communion there, but otherwise see no one at all. Could you write and tell me what you think about this question, and also to the Dean? I feel I would sooner you wrote to the Dean than that I should speak to him of it.

November 3rd.

I am taking your advice about making methodical plans for that time. I dread the going away next week, chiefly because it has been so delightful here, and partly because I hate going away from any place. The good-byes are always so unpleasant.

It was decided, after a good deal of discussion, that he should go to Lincoln for his retreat. He did so, taking

rooms in a park lodge a few miles outside the city. In his letters home he mentions how he walked to certain places recollected from among childhood's dim or oddly vivid memories; he recognises this or that triviality; this or that massive fact he wholly has forgotten. He examines the Chancery; notes his father's coat-of-arms in the window; haunts the Cathedral, which he finds of unique and transcendent beauty; "Cologne," he decides, "does not come anywhere near it," an independent judgment which perhaps does him credit. What he seems *not* to mention is the period of "desolation," as they say, through which he passed there, and on which he insists so much in the *Confessions*.

He had arranged to spend the day in prayer, meditation, and exercise. It is significant that he already often recites the "Little Hours" at anyrate, though, of course, in English. For reasons diversely to be diagnosed, he enters a "mental agony." There is no truth in religion: Jesus Christ is not God; the whole of life is an empty sham; he himself is, if not the chiefest of sinners, at least the most monumental of fools. On Advent Sunday he walks, fasting, into Lincoln, communicates, sits about in the dusky nave of the Cathedral. The sonorous offices of Advent proceed: there is always a touch of tragedy and terror in their austerity. The Second Coming is announced in prayer and hymn, and be it true or untrue, the future seems either way cloudy and appalling.

Was this due just to that tense excitement to which Hugh refers, at the prospect of his diaconate, making its reaction felt, as it were, before the time? Was it a kind of struggle of the purely human creature, feeling itself about to be enchained? To all very mobile souls finality brings in varying degree a sense of horror. In the case of

some, the mere trappings of the cleric's state, the compromising collar, the customary suit of solemn black, the touch of superciliousness or of cynic humour discernible in so many of the greetings it becomes a Levite's lot to receive, are enough to terrify their nervous soul, anxious lest one freedom should be bought too dearly at the price of another. For others, the finality of an internal obligation, even celestial, even that of the *sacerdos in æternum*, brings with it the pains of death. Or possibly, as some will surmise, God was bidding His servant pass through that "dark night of the soul" which, since Gethsemane, seems to be preface to all great acts of self-surrender. At this distance of time it were impossible to diagnose the cause of Hugh's spiritual trouble. The clouds cleared somewhat. Hugh returned to Addington, and was ordained deacon in the Parish Church at Croydon. He alludes to this a trifle cynically in his *Confessions*, acknowledging himself "still shaken and . . . spiritually hysterical." Of this same ordination his father, far more deeply moved, wrote in his diary:

> We have had a happy Ember Week—nineteen men, who have passed very well, and given every promise of true ministers. I had the wonderful happiness of laying hands on my Hugh. He had passed First Class in the Universities Preliminary Examination, and was first also in the part which is done here, and especially in the sermon. All the examiners agree. Accordingly he was gospeller. His pre-eminent interest in theology, and the singleness and eagerness of his character give us beautiful hopes of his humble service to God and the poor. He begins, indeed, among the lowest at Hackney Wick in the Eton Mission. God keep him stable and strong in His Son Christ.

Surrounded, then, by the great love of his father and mother, Hugh spent a brief interspace of days at home, at Addington, before actually starting on his new work.

Hugh was sincerely happy in his home; and all that in later years was known as so characteristic of him, all his inventiveness, boyish enthusiasm, keenness on a hundred crossing scents, was already there. Mr. A. Marshall, in the article already quoted, offers us a rare glimpse of that holiday life at Addington, with the ferny glades and hollows of its park, and at Lambeth, with its romantic towers. The Archbishop liked to have young people there, and unbent to them in all kindness and courtesy. "As for Mrs. Benson," Mr. Marshall writes, "it is difficult to speak of her kindness in even terms." She would "pack off" Hugh and Hugh's friends in one of the Archiepiscopal carriages to see a play; she would love to hear of their stealing out to witness the "blood-curdling melodramas" of the Surrey side: "I can see (her) shaking with laughter at Hugh's descriptions of our experiences. She was always ready to get a talk with us; she was as young as we were, and we were very young then, even for our years."

From the organ loft, where one or both of them played, as a rule, at the morning and evening services in the chapel—and it is safe to say that Mr. Marshall was for much in the maintenance and development of Hugh's musical tastes—a way led straight to the Lambeth smoking-room (once, it was said, Cranmer's bedroom). Thither Hugh rushed, fresh from Bach and Palestrina, to his cigarettes, or to the pipe (discarded, as years passed) which once set him alight, as, on his white horse, he rode along Vauxhall from Lambeth down to Addington. There the friends would stay, alone sometimes, using a delightful sunny room called the schoolroom, and having their "abundant meals" in the steward's room. Over these meals they read, but also talked, on topics growing deeper

as the months went by, after Hugh's ordination. Also, they shot, and rode, and, climbing a wooded knoll when evening came, waited, with books in hand, for the wood-pigeons to come over.

I shall be forgiven for quoting one whole paragraph in full:

At the times when the Archbishop was in residence at Addington, life was no less pleasant for a guest such as I was. Hugh's brothers were often there, and there were the two chaplains—young men, as the Archbishop liked them to be, and not too much taken up by their duties, in those quieter months, to be unable to enjoy the ordinary pleasures of a country house. Life went quietly and serenely, with plenty to do, outdoors and in. There was always much discussion going on, especially when the younger men, and others who might be staying in the house, met at night at "Philippi." This was the large attic smoking-room, which had to be away from the rooms occupied by the Archbishop. Sometimes the discussion waxed rather warm. Hugh and one of the chaplains once ended by falling out seriously. The next morning Hugh went away for a few days with the breach still unhealed. When he returned, the chaplain met him, and said, "When you had left, I thought things over, and came to the conclusion that you had been right. So I bought you a box of the most expensive cigarettes, to make up." Then a smile began to spread over his face. "But they were so good that I'm afraid I have smoked them all," he said.

But by this time the real work of his life was beginning for Hugh at Hackney.

. . . . . .

The Eton Mission was one of those many school Missions which were inaugurated in the eighties. They consist, as a rule, of a parish of which the congregation is of the poorest, while the church and its annexes are built and maintained by the subscriptions of the school responsible for the Mission, and staffed, if possible, by

"old boys" of the parent school. These Missions were carried forward by the wave of social and philanthropic enterprise which at that period was sweeping all before it; and they were meant to produce a double effect—the evangelisation, that is, not only of the district in which they existed, but of the school which created them. It was felt, of course, that an accumulation of boys belonging, as the members of the big public schools are supposed on the whole to do, to the wealthier classes might be taught in this way the responsibilities of fortune, and also, by the various kinds of contact thus engineered, be brought into organic and spiritual connection with classes other than their own. It would be out of place to discuss how far this plan succeeds; what is quite clear is that the several Missions do provide a rallying-point, a centre naturally turned to, for those Etonians, Harrovians, and Wykehamists, and so on, who from whatever cause find themselves touched with social zeal. That it will be the "old boys," rather than the actual generation of the school, who in various ways are thus awakened, does not imply that the enterprise, even as a school enterprise, is a failure. If the Mission clergy be men, like the late Fr. Dolling, who know how to put themselves in sympathy with boys' imagination and points of view, there is no reason why even at school boys should not take a keen and formative interest in their Mission. It remains that I cannot remember any such interest being generally felt for the only Mission I have personally known, and Mr. A. C. Benson seems to imply that neither at Eton was the Hackney Wick parish an object of much actual enthusiasm. I need not say that merely to invite subscriptions from the boys to their Mission or settlement is of all methods the most futile: personal service is alone of value.

The Rev. St. Clair Donaldson had, it will be remembered, invited Hugh's presence on the Mission staff as early as 1893. This clergyman, afterwards Archbishop of Brisbane, is described as Evangelical by Mr. A. C. Benson, and as doing a work at Hackney Wick which was "moderate, kindly, and sensible," in succession to a very High Church vicar, the Rev. William Carter, afterwards Archbishop of Capetown. The enterprise had become, by 1895, a very considerable affair: church, church-house, clubs, and the like were impressive and well subsidised; there were, I think, two, or perhaps three, curates besides Hugh. Hugh mentions that the more "Catholic" of the methods once in vogue in the Mission had been modified. The confessions heard in the vestry were now rare; the daily celebration in Bodley's solemn Gothic church, with its Latin inscriptions and air of High Church Anglicanism, had been reduced in number; a ladies' settlement sought to do the work Catholics would usually entrust to nuns; temperance propaganda throve; the Band of Hope was said to be the best in London.

I should be ready to believe that Hugh was happier there than you could gather from his *Confessions,* or even from his letters of this period, though these, I confess, seem more robust and full of downright jokes than before or after. Other letters, addressed to him when he left, show how much he had made himself beloved. Besides, as I said, he writes to his father with regard to what the Archbishop wanted to be told rather than with a spontaneous expression of what filled his own mind; and the *Confessions,* in all this part, are a guide of doubtful value psychologically speaking. His mother, utterly in sympathy (as from more than one of her letters is apparent) with their portrait of his feelings

after, say, 1902, cannot recognise their full truthfulness previously to that date.

The first letter he wrote to the Archbishop from the Mission gives some sort of picture of his life there:

[*January* 1895.]

When I arrived on Friday night I went to a large children's party, with prize-giving, &c., and last night I just went into an "Infants' Tea"—and to-day there has been teaching in the Sunday School, which I found very hard, much harder than preaching, as one sees the boredom of one's audience so much more clearly. Then there was a large children's service. . . . I feel so terribly incompetent at present. All the rest of them know the children by sight and name, &c. And at present I scarcely know a single person by sight. Also, they know how to do things—and I am only falling over my own experiments—but I suppose these things will improve. I am looking forward very much to my time here. . . . I have not got to preach for some time yet, I am glad to say.

And a little later:

January 1895.

I am attached to the Men's Club here particularly, and have to go in generally in the evening and talk to them; they are much more sociable than I expected, and I think I have made friends with five or six of them. But there is a class of them who play cards, and apparently have not the slightest wish to pay one any attention. In visiting I have made a beginning; but it is very hard starting with a large number of people none of whom I have ever seen before. We all meet—the ladies as well—and go over the district on paper on Monday morning. For the first time, to-day, I have been deputed to visit sick people in my district, and am going to do it this afternoon, but I am very anxious about it.

And again:

January 18, 1895.

I find this a terrible place for sleepiness. One does not get back to the house generally till eleven, and one cannot instantly go to bed; and there is Service every

morning at eight at least—sometimes at 7.30. And I am always very sleepy in the morning, and have several devices for waking—an alarum, and a string tied to my finger which is pulled like a bell-rope from outside. This morning everything failed except the alarum, which woke me. I find it quite necessary to have more than one thing to depend on.

Sinclair works most terribly hard, and is perpetually on the move about the parish; with addresses, &c. I cannot think how he does it to that extent; and he is always perfectly cheerful, which is most reassuring. He is quite a splendid person to be under.

I am beginning to have sick visiting, and I think that on the whole it is easier than ordinary visiting: it always seems hard to say certain things out of a clear sky, which is not so in sick visiting. The sick seem to expect it much more; it is extraordinary how a sick person seems to be a kind of free show to all the neighbours, who crowd into the room and stare solemnly. The sick person himself, too, seems to appreciate the dignity of suffering, though they often turn it into the conceit of suffering instead.

He lost no time, however, in creating some such environment as he felt himself to need.

Most of my pictures are hung now, and bookcases are beginning to come in. I have an immense lot of books—many of them novels (in which I am my mamma's son). Several also dealing with drawing-room mysticism (in which also I am my mamma's son).

In the sketch-book I have mentioned above there are numerous little portraits of Hugh's fellow-curates, by Hugh, and of Hugh by them. Hugh sits, as a rule, in an attitude of contented collapse, in a vast arm-chair. There are two or three indescribably depressing drawings of the Hackney Marshes; and one page is full of tiny sketches of all manner of Mission athletic sports, and other Mission incidents. A billiard table is labelled "every evening"; a youth playing baseball (one would gather) is ticketed

"every day." There are cricket and football matches, and races; a card-table, and an enormous soup-kitchen with Gothic windows. A Hackney dame exclaims, in a phrase Hugh was singularly devoted to, "We can't help being poor, but we *can* help being honest"; and the central figure of the page is a really well-characterised coster, shouting, at the "Eton Mission and Mansfield House" match, in 1895, "Bust 'is 'ead, Butty!" Sometimes a brief legend disarms our criticism: "This is intended to represent the dog 'Timothy'—with the fireplace behind, but it is not really very like him or the fireplace." And in the midst of these full-blooded caricatures, appears the exotic black and white silhouette of "A Lady, after Aubrey Beardsley." This is a tiny hint; but it is reinforced by a sentence from a very entertaining correspondent, who regrets that two letters of Hugh's have never reached him. "It is a blow to me," he writes, "to hear what I lost—all the virtue of *The Green Carnation* without the vice, no doubt." He also tells Hugh a story about Mr. Richard Le Gallienne, adding, "Please don't tell the story as coming from me, for I don't believe a word of it. Tell it as X's, or better still, Y's." He recommends a story by Mr. Montague James in the *National Review*. "It is a gem—thoroughly Jamesian with slight touches of Lefanu, and quite as blood-curdling." Observe, then, the authors, whom Benson, in his conventional environment, did not deny to himself. Else, he became accustomed to regard the Eton Mission as an extreme instance of the Suitable, a category for which he has, you will notice, a cordial detestation. In *None Other Gods*, the Mission is depicted in a mixed spirit of affection, respect, and amused annoyance. The curate visits his district, and that makes a bitter little vignette: Frank Guiseley calls on the curate, and finds his

room a portent of suitability: its chairs, its photos, its trophies, its cocoa, its occupant are all so exactly what they should be. . . . And if you seek for his extremest condemnation of the suitable, you will find it, I think, incarnated in the marriage of Annie Hamilton and Lord Brasted in *The Sentimentalists*, and of Lady Sarah and Jim in *A Winnowing*. But there is hardly a modern book of his in which he does not gibe at the "Suitable." All that, he wanted to see burnt up by the "fire of love," which was precisely what the diagnosis of Mr. A. C. Benson sees to be lacking in the Mission's ordered philanthropy.

Hugh, therefore, was confessedly not in his place in the Hackney Wick Church house, and felt this.

"He never found (his duties there)," his brother writes in *Hugh*, "a congenial occupation, and I cannot help feeling that it was rather a case of putting a very delicate and subtle instrument to do a rough sort of work. What was needed was a hearty, kindly, elder-brotherly relation, and the men who did this best were the good-natured and robust men with a generic interest in the young, who could set a clean-minded, wholesome, and hearty example. But Hugh was not of this type. His mind was full of mystical and poetical ideas of religion, and his artistic nature was intent upon expressing them. He was successful in a way, because he had by this time a great charm of frankness and simplicity; he never had the least temptation to draw social distinctions, but he desired to find people personally interesting. He used to say afterwards that he did not really believe in what involved a sort of social condescension, and, like another incisive missioner, he thought that the giving up a few evenings a week by wealthy and even fashionable young men, however good-hearted and earnest, to sharing the amusements of the boys of a parish, was only a very uncomfortable way of showing the poor how the rich lived!"

It may be said that in his work with children he found what was best suited to his temperament.

"In 1895," a friend of his wrote afterwards, "when he was at the Eton Mission, I once heard him take a Children's Service, and afterwards train a whole lot of children for a Christmas pantomime, which he had himself written, on the *Rose and the Ring*. I do not know which performance was the more impressive. He established strong cords of sympathy and affection with children, and I think they loved him because he loved them."

He continued his custom of using fairy-stories as an "approach," which he had begun at Pontcanna.

"I lent him," he writes to Mrs. Benson, "the *Green Fairy Book*, with Mary Benson, Addington, written in the beginning. That book has done a surprising amount of work, and I expect will do a good deal more before you see it again: if such an unlikely thing ever happens."

He takes children down to Addington, and his letters are full of the *Rose and the Ring* when he is preparing that pantomime; he sketches its rehearsal, too, in his little book, and it would seem to have been a very considerable affair. To bear out his friend's juxtaposition of ritual and rehearsal, there exists, too, a book of Children's Services, and instructions most accurately planned. Yet he did not confine his instructions, nor his successes, to children.

"I am beginning," he tells his father, "two classes a week for some of our choir men on the Prayer Book and Bible—the Bible Classes are for the Sunday School Examination. It is delightful to try to teach people who want to learn—for a change:"

and he certainly finds that it is by these more *conversational* approaches that he comes nearer souls than in the pulpit. In view of his later experiences, it is odd to find that he could not preach extempore.

Once he did indeed attempt to do so, with much nervousness and hesitation.

The same evening St. Clair Donaldson said to him kindly but firmly that preachers were of two kinds—the kind that could write a fairly coherent discourse and deliver it more or less impressively, and the kind that might venture, after careful preparation, to speak extempore; and that he felt bound to tell Hugh that he belonged undoubtedly to the first kind.[1]

Lord Stanmore, however, Mr. A. C. Benson goes on to say, no inexperienced judge, placed Hugh even before his conversion in the first rank of Anglican preachers.

On one famous occasion, extempore harangue was forced upon Hugh. He had been appointed to read the funeral service, and, at the set hour, no hearse arrived. Hugh read collects and suitable passages of Scripture and delivered an address. Finally he gave out the number of a hymn; it was unknown; the organist had deserted his post. Hugh sang the hymn as a solo.

This was, I think, the funeral of which he writes:

I am taking my first funeral to-day—a child whom I visited when he was ill. I had to go and see him lying in state, which was horrible. The parents had a sense of pleased proprietorship which was not so apparent when he was alive; and there were doors to be unlocked, and horrible yellow blinds to cast a lurid light.

Quite early in his stay at the Eton Mission—in fact, in February, 1895—he was invited to attend a retreat at Kemsing, a village near Sevenoaks, afterwards important in his life. The retreat marked an epoch. Of it he wrote to his father the following brief words:

My dear Papa,—I am writing to wish you many happy returns of the day for to-morrow; I am afraid I have not often remembered your birthday before.

We have had a delightful time here this last week; the addresses were splendid. There were about twelve clergy here, together with three or four laymen.

[1] *Hugh*, p. 86.

One of these laymen was Mr. A. Marshall, who went, like Hugh, nervous lest the flesh should be too weak to bear the strain of a retreat lasting two full days, and involving seven addresses in all, of an hour each, a day strictly mapped out, and offices recited in common. "But there was no strain," says Mr. Marshall. "Fr. Maturin, then of the Cowley Fathers, of all the preachers I have ever heard, was, at his best, the most capable of holding his hearers' attention; and he was at his very best then. He sat in a chair on the chancel step, underneath the carved arcading of the rood loft, and talked; and I, for one, hardly took my eyes off him."

"I was," says Benson,[1] "completely taken by storm. For the first time Christian Doctrine, as Father Maturin preached it, displayed itself to me as an orderly scheme. I saw now how things fitted on one to the other, how the sacraments followed inevitably from the Incarnation, how body and spirit were alike met in the mercy of God. . . . He caught up my fragments of thought, my glimpses of spiritual experience, my gropings in the twilight, and showed me the whole, glowing and transfigured in an immense scheme whose existence I had not suspected. He touched my heart also, profoundly, as well as my head, revealing to me the springs and motives of my own nature in a completely new manner."

Hugh, however, on those wintry afternoons, argued "in his hot, dogmatic way, which yet was logical and persuasive," says Mr. Marshall, against the practice of Confession, on which Fr. Maturin so strongly dwelt. There was no hint that Hugh would budge from his *via media* of doctrine, which was so accurate that he considered its suitable expression, in clerical dress, to be a frock-coat, a white tie, and any collar that was not Roman. . . . Hugh at this time believed that, in days gone by, the Church of

[1] *Confessions*, p. 35.

England had admittedly stood for a certain scheme of religion, neither Roman nor Protestant, and that this had been authoritatively recognised.

"I believe," says Mr. Marshall, shrewdly at anyrate, "that if he had lived at the beginning of the nineteenth century instead of at the end, he would never have left the Church of England. He was an extreme controversialist at all times, but it was necessary for him to feel that he had widely-admitted authority behind him. That has been impossible in the Church of England since the Oxford Movement turned its level plain into a mountain, upon one slope or other of which its clergy must find a foothold, each for himself. There is no authority that is universally accepted in the Church of England, and with Hugh's temperament, when he had once set foot upon the slope that is on the Romeward side, he was bound to end where he did, little as he or his friends thought it. I remember his saying to me, a few years after he had 'gone over': 'It is such a relief to find my bishop as High Church as I am.' He had reached the level ground then, and could use all his artillery against those still on the slopes, without fear of being attacked from a position higher up or lower down."

I think it was at this time, or very slightly later, that he made a full and elaborate transcript of St. Ignatius's *Exercises*, with amplifications. The results of this are seen in *By What Authority?* written, of course, before he was a Catholic. Later on, his spirituality migrated somewhat from the Ignatian to what he considered a more Carthusian or Benedictine method.

Hugh returned, after the retreat, to Hackney Wick, and in due course was ordained. He relates that he prefaced his new life by a general confession, made, with the Archbishop's full knowledge and consent, to a kind and skilful clergyman, who set Hugh a penance which would last half an hour daily till his next confession, three months

distant. The joy which followed this confession was, he says, "simply indescribable. I went home in a kind of ecstasy." So, too, was his ordination an "immense happiness." He walked about the Addington woods, exulting in the conviction that he was now a priest, and could do for others what they hitherto had done for him. Here, indeed, is the sacerdotal spirit: Hugh Benson feels that he has not only a higher position, but is in some sense altered even as man, by his ordination. A new and unique spirit, and hence a new, unshared power of action, is within him.

He returns, therefore, to the Eton Mission full of a new enthusiasm, more than content, obstinately sure, for instance, that the intellectual position of his Cambridge friend (now Fr. Ritchie of the Birmingham Oratory) must necessarily, being Romanist, be ridiculous.[1] Still, he goes to stay with him in Cornwall, and, having no cassock of his own, borrows his friend's religious habit, and, in a sort of joyous excitement, wears it in the pulpit of the parish church.[2]

For all that, his personal religion was still deepening, and, together with a dawning notion of the corporate life of the Christian as symbolised in and produced through the Sacraments, he begins to realise that these very

[1] Riding one day with the Archbishop down Bird-Cage Walk towards Lambeth, he will declare he has never understood that article of the creed which professes belief in the Holy Catholic Church. For instance, he inquires, are the Roman Catholics "a part of the Church of Christ"? The Archbishop could not answer categorically: perhaps their errors had been such as to involve their forfeiting membership in Christ's Body . . . I give this anecdote, abbreviating a little, from the *Confessions*. It is right to say that to Hugh's family this appears wholly uncharacteristic of the Archbishop, "who always answered such questions fully and eagerly."

[2] Why, then, so excitedly? Simply with the schoolboy's joy in dressing up, which led him to appropriate and wear a friend's M.A. hood at a religious function in Sunningdale? How long will it be before this element of excitement will be filtered from his life?

sacraments are perhaps necessary for that materialising of religion exacted too by the soul as individual. The clubs and visiting and pantomimes and all the programme of philanthropy, so scientifically and self-regardlessly carried out at the Eton Mission, seem to him almost non-religious. He begins to long for a chaplain's life, and in January, 1896, asks to discuss, with his father, plans for a near departure.

But the decision was taken from his hands. In October 1896, the Archbishop died suddenly, in Mr. Gladstone's church at Hawarden. Hugh was given the telegram when actually taking Sunday School. He travelled down to Hawarden that night, and, in the train, read the Evensong appointed for that day. In the Second Lesson, he will always thereafter recollect, occurred these words: "Lord, suffer me first to bury my father, and then I will follow Thee." The days of burial were indeed full of a certain distraction of "dignity and sorrow." Hugh celebrated at Hawarden before he left for Canterbury, where the actual funeral took place in a violent storm of thunder, rain, and wind. Hugh returned to Addington, still half dazed with the shock of so many violent impressions. "There was a sensation," as long afterwards he remembered some one saying to him, "as if the roof were gone. However grown-up one is, one's father always stands as a sort of protective covering to one's own weakness." He had meant, as from a letter from his vicar is quite clear, to return on the subsequent Saturday to Hackney. "I can quite imagine you will wish to do so. For, after all, work is a welcome refuge." But at a week's notice he was ordered to Egypt with his mother and sister, being threatened with rheumatic fever, and he never returned to the Mission. He sailed in the *Sutlej* from Venice on

Nov. 25; and I see that on Nov. 20 his going to a curacy at Kemsing had already been arranged.[1]

A few pathetic letters of farewell survive among his papers. Let me quote one which any man might feel happy to receive.

A parishioner wrote to him:

Can you not go away for the winter and come back to us in the spring do not leave us altogether we are all rough and Ignorant but our love is strong if not shown in the best way, and I feel that I am in some way answerable for your Trouble I wish I had not spoken to you as I did it worries me more than I can say and yet I only answered you according to what you was saying. . . . I am selfish but I know I was one of the first you visited when you first came and you did not mind my rough way of speaking to you and there are a great many who think just as much as we do . . . do not give us up altogether it seems so strange that as soon as we get a clergyman we like they leave us we must be a dreadful lot of people.

He closed thus a momentous chapter in his life. It had included that ordination which will govern so much of his future, for he will never be able to think of himself otherwise than as a priest, and therefore with the duty of acting directly upon souls. His personal charm and power will reinforce his belief, and he will succeed in this line of direct spiritual action, and he will feel no need for further professional study, nor fear lest by leaving to one side the ordinary cares of parochial energy, he is abandon-

[1] There is an anecdote which shows, I think, the sort of gentle flippancy often noticeable in Hugh, which, when mingled with genuine gravity of underlying feeling, issues, I think, almost into tenderness.

"I had been taught," a friend of Hugh's has written to me, "to love and admire the Archbishop, through reading A. C. Benson's biography. After visiting the tomb at Canterbury, I said to Mgr. Benson: 'I felt more inclined to ask his prayers than to pray for him.' 'Yes,' he answered, 'I understand that.' 'I don't believe,' I said, 'a man like that has any Purgatory.' He answered with a twinkle: 'Oh, I think if it was left to me, I'd give him about five minutes.'"

Hugh Benson regularly said Mass for his father's soul.

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ing his duty. He has found his road, and all his reading and observation will be arranged, henceforward, to corroborate his march therein.

One regret he will always keep. He had not really known the father whose devotion for him was so passionate and profound. Even when he realised him the better from his own increasing experience, his love had remained all too inarticulate. Years later, on reading the Archbishop's life by Mr. A. C. Benson, he will recognise this yet more fully, and to his mother he will write from Cambridge:

July 9th, 1905.

By the way, I have been reading through papa's Life—what a book! It is one of the most interesting and affecting things I have ever read. And how extraordinarily well Arthur has done it! I wish I could have read it twenty years ago.

Meanwhile, his horizon was to widen rapidly, and his whole spiritual life to grow yet more marked and moulded in its destined lines.

CHAPTER VI

AT KEMSING

Con Fanciulli Fanciullo sapientemente.
From an Epigram on St. Philip Neri at Rome.

MRS. CRAIGIE, when relating the very singular conversion of Lord Marlesford, tells how he started for Norway, but broke the journey at Paris, which he found

insufferably tedious, and a story too old for words. He abandoned the Norway expedition, and went instead to Venice. In Venice it seemed almost vulgar to be a Protestant; he hurried on to Florence. To be a Protestant in Florence is to be a tourist at best! He went to Rome. To be a Protestant in Rome was to be uncivilised, illiterate, and a shade ridiculous. Two months later he was received into the Roman Church.

The few months which Hugh Benson now spent in the East had, in sober fact, really something of a similar influence upon him. His contentment with the Church of England suffered a shock. He travelled straight through France and across North Italy to Venice, and in church after church he found himself, as an ecclesiastical official, to be ignored. "Behold! we were nowhere." From Venice he sailed to Egypt, and at Luxor assisted the hotel chaplain in his services, feeling the whole business to be "terribly isolated and provincial." You recognise how out of place are the Englishwomen you will meet in continental trains, drinking their tea cooked over spirit-lamps, with milk boiled for fear of infection; you resent their clothes, revealed, in France, as perfectly impossible;

you feel brutal towards their stiffnesses, and derisive of their timid unconventionalities, their condescensions to the fact that here they are "abroad." So, I think without flippancy, one may say Hugh felt towards the decorous prayer-book offices recited by clergymen in Egyptian hotels. In one place he explicitly sees the English religion carried about by its owner, as some comfortable and customary appendage, an india-rubber bath. . . .

Mr. J. H. Molesworth, then a clergyman of the Church of England, met him first at Luxor, where, "with characteristic energy and enthusiasm, Hugh was excavating in the Temple of Muth." They then inaugurated a friendship which lasted unbroken till his death. There, too, Hugh entered a little village church, hut-like among other Arab huts, and, for all the spangles, muslin, and crimped paper of its decoration, he felt that it was there in its proper place, and had become racy of the soil. In its strange atmosphere, Catholic faith for the first time, he surmises, stirred within him. The enormous question for the first time addressed itself to him: Could Rome be right? The respect involved in fear began to substitute itself for the contempt he had so far felt for the papal system.[1] For his "reassurance" he fled to the Copts, and sent a pair of candlesticks, on his return to England, to the Coptic priest, for his altar. . . . Were the Copts in schism? Benson did not stop to ask. He felt himself, perhaps, in something of a glass house. At Cairo he had already had two audiences of the Coptic Patriarch. He

[1] How various are the lenses through which souls view their world! The Archbishop, on his tour in Algeria, wrote to the Bishop of Rochester: "I am much impressed with the [Mohammedan] religion. . . . The Romanists, with their tawdry idols of St. Joseph, the Immaculate Conception, &c., will never win these Monotheists. The churches are less spiritual in conception now than the mosques. . . ." The Archbishop too was a sensitive impressionist. Only, the impressions fell upon temperaments how different!

now wrote, begging to be admitted into communion with him. The Patriarch would not answer, and Hugh was "left shivering."

In Jerusalem, which Benson reached somewhat later, and apparently alone, he re-encountered Mr. Molesworth. Here, as the latter has kindly written,

> We arranged to travel together through the Holy Land, sharing the same tent. In this way I saw a great deal of him, and it established an intimacy between us. I shall always reckon it a singular piece of good fortune that I had as a companion on that camping-out expedition from Jerusalem to Damascus one who could approach the Holy Places with so sympathetic and imaginative a mind. His eager enthusiasm and buoyant spirits, I remember, communicated themselves to the entire party of fellow-travellers.
>
> The recollection of our tour in Palestine stands out fresh in my mind to-day, although eighteen years have elapsed since then. We were generally in the saddle most of the day, starting at six in the morning, and he used thoroughly to enjoy the ride in the keen morning air. Nothing escaped his notice as we visited one after another the sacred places. At nights in our tent we used to have long talks on a variety of subjects, and he was fond of telling me of ghost stories and apparitions associated with haunted houses, &c., in which the Archbishop had been interested. I thought afterwards I saw in all this a germ of the ideas that appeared in his earlier books, though at that time he seemed to be wholly unconscious of the literary powers he subsequently displayed.

His conversation turned readily on the topic which was beginning to haunt him, and the road between Jerusalem and Damascus once more was witness of a spiritual upheaval, though it was the beginning, this time, not the consummating of a process which should change a man into loving what once he hated; but a goad at least was offered now to Hugh against which, for a while, his restive feet might kick. At Jerusalem itself he found the Anglican

Bishop kind, and was asked to preach in his chapel, and was given a cross now hanging on an image of Our Lady. . . . He obtained, too, leave to celebrate in the Chapel of Abraham, and the Confraternity of the Blessed Sacrament provided him with vestments; but the Greeks wheeled in a table to replace their altar, which they denied to him, and watched him with polite curiosity from the door. Sect after sect, too, officiated at the Sepulchre: "strange uncouth rites" went forward at Bethlehem. Alone the Anglican Church was held aloof. For all that, he surrounded the Oriental Churches with the pathetic halo given by men to what they woo and cannot win, while on Rome he bore with a hardness which Mr. Molesworth considered to be unmerited. Certainly he was angered to feel himself in "full communion" with some Irish Protestant fellow-travellers, and wore his cassock publicly, by way of protest, and joined with an American clergyman, now a Catholic, who had brought with him a full equipment for saying Mass, and recited Office even when on horseback. It was something of a douche after this, to be snubbed by a shopman who declared that despite the cassock Mr. Benson must be a clergyman, not a priest. . . .

"A subject," Mr. Molesworth writes, "in which we were both interested at that time was Community Life in the Church of England. And we used to talk about its growth and possibilities a great deal. I remember he then considered the Cowley Fathers' system as too rigid and severe, not quite human enough, perhaps not quite enough English. The Mirfield life had also not then appealed to him. But he was attracted by the picture represented in *John Inglesant*, and the life established at Little Gidding by Nicholas Ferrar. We talked so much about this as being the life in accordance with the genius of the Church of England, that at a later date I made a

special pilgrimage to Little Gidding, and reported to him on what I thought its possibilities."

Hugh emphasized the need of keeping the Community quite "English," by which he says he meant "Catholic." "We were," he writes, "to wear no Eucharistic vestments, but full surplices and black scarfs, and were to do nothing in particular."

At Damascus, however, something of a thunderbolt did fall. The *Guardian* reached him even there, and told him that Father Maturin had been received into the Church. The man who had given him, for the first time, a vision of Christendom and an intelligible scheme of dogma had transferred his allegiance to that See whose voice, Benson afterwards declared, was even then calling him, and being disregarded.

His return to England and to Kemsing was, in effect, a flight. Hugh's advent, as I said, had been arranged almost immediately after his father's death. The vicar of Kemsing was the Rev. T. Carleton Skarratt, a clergyman of much refinement and culture. He held out great attractions to Hugh Benson, promising him not only a moderate income over and above his board and lodging, but two rooms for living in, the "yellow bedroom" and his own study, provided that he were still allowed to see parishioners there privately.

"I would give you," he wrote, "a free hand with the children, as until now I have never been able to trust them to anyone else—the Kemsing [? morning] school wants, too, more system and method. Also, there is the day school—a most important field. We have 196 children in the day school, and 120 in the Sunday school."

He has been, he adds, coaching children for a "Eucharist," but has been obliged to give up young men and boys, and alludes to the "much sin and ignorance,

and still more indifference and hardness of heart" Hugh would discover in the village. Much "patience and forbearance," he also reminded Hugh, would be needed in "the extreme test to us both of living together," and recommended a simple rule of life and prayer to which both should adhere. "There is no lack of organisation here, as you know," he optimistically declared, "but co-operation is necessary."

Hugh therefore came to Kemsing, which is near Sevenoaks, and looks south from behind the shelter of those chalk downs over which the Pilgrims' Way, running from Winchester to Canterbury, passes. A church has stood at Kemsing for some thousand years, and St. Edith, natural daughter of King Edgar, was born there in 961. At St. Dunstan's stern behest, the King founded an abbey there, whose abbess she became, as well as secondary patron, after Our Lady, of the parish. The church was restored in 1260, and oak beams of that period still remain in it, as well as a very ancient wooden door, with its fifteenth-century bolts and hinges, and a marvellous Saxon or early Norman font. Saxon, too, are the walls of the nave, with many faint traces of frescoes still apparent. The fifteenth-century glass of the east window remained intact till 1826, when it was broken, I am told, as "too papistical"; one glass medallion of Our Lady dates from 1220. Another medallion, the Benson coat, was given by Hugh Benson. The screen is fifteenth century, but the superb loft and figures and the appointments of the sanctuary are modern.

Hugh was fascinated with the place, and decided, as he always will, on arriving at a new locality with which he falls in love, never to leave it. . . .

"This is a most charming place," he writes in May. "You would love it, I think, as a peaceful country vicarage,

with a large garden. There is a perfectly beautiful church just below the house; the churchyard joins on to the garden. And there is a decided Conservative population. It is not unlike Addington in the tone of the people. . . . Most of the big people are away, for which one is thankful.

"As far as I can see, I wish to stop here the rest of my life. It is pure bliss in every way."

And to his mother he wrote:

May 2, 1897.

MY DEAR MAMMA,—Here I am at last. It is all perfectly heavenly. . . . Archie [Marshall] has appointed himself sacristan of the church, and I have appointed him, most unwillingly on his part, catechist for the children. Also, we are going to start and edit a parish magazine together. I have just come out from a children's service, and am preaching this evening.

Of all people, I met Beth at Victoria. She had guessed at my train and come to meet me, and is looking brilliantly well. "Eh, now! tell your mamma that you have seen me." But I had to hurry away, and couldn't talk to her for more than a few minutes. . . .

I am afraid you are having horribly hot weather. I wish we could give you some of the cold wind here. I am wearing Jaeger, but there is a divine blue sky. You must really come down here soon. We have our first children's Eucharist on June 11, and Frank is going to compose at once a special service for them. But you mustn't come for the first; you must come when we have seen that it is all right in every way. But some time in June again there will be another.

The C——'s aren't here. One dreads horribly making the acquaintance of everybody. Everybody is a meaningless blur at present—all exactly alike. One can only divide them into dark and fair.

We have got a Confirmation in this church on Wednesday—the second since the Reformation.

There are all kinds of people always turning up . . . so there is a deal of company.

My rooms here are lovely: I have turned Mr. Skarratt out of his study, and Frank out of his bedroom. I must be getting some of my furniture down this week.

I am going up to the Eton Mission this week, I expect, for a rehearsal of the pantomime.

It is all so perfect that I sit and smile with delight at Mr. Skarratt and the Marshalls, with the expression of an earnest Christian, and they smile back.

We had a lovely crossing from Calais to Dover; and I ate roast mutton, thank you, in the cabin, and then smoked cigarettes on deck. Some people, though, were ill.—Ever your most loving son, HUGH.

Even much later, as a Catholic, he invited a friend to pass with him, on a walking tour, through Kemsing:

Skarratt and his house and church! [he cries]. They are too beautiful! And he is exactly like Napoleon Bonaparte, painted red; and the Wooden Man of Boulak. He also has an Italian garden, and a choir that sing like seraphim.

It is quite true that Hugh's life there was extraordinarily pleasant. The Vicarage was relatively luxurious,[1] and its hospitality was generous. Hugh was surrounded with friends: Mr. Archibald Marshall was living in the village, and his brother, Mr. F. Marshall, in the Vicarage itself.

Besides these, there was afterwards present M. Alexis Larpent, who from his home in Paris, and despite his grave infirmities, has most generously sent to me his reminiscences of Hugh.

They date from early in 1896, when M. Larpent was at Addington. He is a patristic scholar, and was assisting the Archbishop in seeing his *St. Cyprian* through the Press. He arrived on the day of the "Household Ball," and at dinner, which was served in the Chinese room, he met Hugh, who was full of the Eton Mission and danced

[1] When I visited it, the late summer had stripped the grounds of their best glories. Still, round the many lawns, on the terraces, and in the Italian garden, roses and purple clematis and huge tufts of sweet peas and smoke-blue flowers looked gorgeous against yew hedges, clipped into fantastic forms, and in the tiny ponds crimson water-lilies burned.

energetically the whole evening through.[1] M. Larpent, who confesses to "une certaine frayeur de ce que l'on appelle social work," could not be persuaded to talk to Hugh even by the news that the young cleric had written piously on St. Bernard. He carried away with him, however, an impression of happiness and purity, and of a certain radiance of spirit, from his brief encounter.

Two years later, M. Larpent went to Kemsing to ask Hugh for a MS. of the late Archbishop, dealing with the Apocalypse, which Hugh possessed: Miss Benson had begged M. Larpent to look through it. *Quantum mutatus!* Hugh was dressed in a cassock; he wore a crucifix in his belt. He was intent upon that "catholicising" of the parish at which he hints in the *Confessions*. He had to travel warily. The rector and himself used linen vestments, lights, and wafers, but only at the early celebrations. At midday the squire attended, and the squire, though kindly, was Low Church. Yet the Eucharist was already dear to Hugh, and he suffered from this accepting of persons. Once, to the village's amaze, he carried the sacrament from the altar to the sick. He read the service slowly and with pauses—a habit he afterwards repudiated—and sometimes wearied (as à Kempis feared might happen) those assisting. A clergyman declared that he was *selfish* at the altar. M. Larpent, who had been educated in that Catholic faith to which Hugh watched him, later, step by step return, had retained intact his love for the Mother of God, and gave to

[1] Hugh more than once alludes in letters to his loathing for dances, the likelihood of which, indeed, can lead him to refuse invitations to sojourns, pleasant else, in country houses. After a dinner, too, he writes to his mother that he finds he hates young ladies more than he thought possible. . . . I believe that like many people, for all that, he enjoyed dancing, hateful in prospect, once he had begun to dance.

Hugh that icon known as Our Lady of Perpetual Succour, in which the instruments of the Passion are presented by angels to the contemplation of the Divine Child and His Mother.

Hugh's churchmanship, in these circumstances, raced upwards. He goes regularly, four times in the year, to London for confession, and is congratulated by his confessor on his Catholic instincts. He joins the English Church Union, the Confraternity of the Blessed Sacrament, and the Guild of All Souls. For all that, he considered himself a stalwart anti-Roman. The English spirit was what he boasted of, possessed in the seventh century by the national Church before she joined herself to Rome, and in the sixteenth, after she rejected the papal tyranny. In the older edition of the Litany, Hugh found a petition which delighted him, "From the Bishop of Rome and all his detestable enormities good Lord deliver us." The Greek Church was still the subject of applause, and the Italian Mission of contempt. Hugh chuckled with glee when he perceived that, on the occasion of the Queen's Diamond Jubilee Thanksgiving Service, held on the steps of St. Paul's, the coped bishops wore, if not real mitres, at least a headgear of glittering, though varied, types. The papal legate would have to tell the Pope how the Bishop of London had on a "superb gold skull-cap which was very nearly as good as a mitre." And he was delighted when a clergyman in the crowd was mistaken for a Roman priest. How one recognises here the forced and rather nervous banter of younger men, "smart" even in their religion, and offering as yet no clue as to the direction in which their maturing instincts are to carry them, nor even whether their instincts *will* mature. . . .

In Hugh, however, there was no fear lest deeper

thoughts should not prevail. The charm of ritual itself gave him from time to time the sick apprehension that possibly it might be but a drug. The chancel brass of a certain pre-Reformation priest, Thomas de Hope, had irony in its glance.[1] The papal decision against Anglican Orders moved him less indeed than might have been expected, but left him with a "bruised sensation" in his soul; again, he was made to feel himself something of an "outsider." . . . Above all, he was feeling (M. Larpent can recall) that the sobriety of Anglicanism lacked fire and the will to soar. . . . Hugh realises that even the work to which he here gives himself lacks, as did the Eton Mission, something that he is seeking. He took delight in the choir, which in Mr. Marshall's hands reached a perfection quite extraordinary in the circumstances—for Kemsing was but a small community of villagers; and the plays to which he gave himself heart and soul were a remarkably civilising influence. I speak of them briefly, from the dramatic point of view, below; here I will but emphasize that they were no trivialities, like the *Rose and the Ring* of Hackney. Music, orchestra, scenery, costume, and even professional training were so perfect that, says Mr. A. Marshall, Hugh could keep up his performance to crowded houses for a week, people coming from all the country round, and even from London, to see them.

The children came eagerly up for rehearsal and for training, and as the time drew on for the great week, we had them with us almost all day and every day. It had a remarkably good effect in softening their speech and their manners, and in raising their intelligence. In this small village, after the first rather rough performance,

[1] "It is the oldest half bust in England," and may date from 1340–1350. Thomas de Hope died at Kemsing in 1347. He occurs in *The Coward*, and indeed Medhurst village, there described, is a rather severe caricature of Kemsing.

there was never any difficulty in finding young actors and actresses of surprising ability for the chief parts, and the thirty or so who took part were all much more than competent. I have since seen several much advertised troupes of village players, but in the third play that Hugh wrote for the Kemsing children, they were far and away better than any of them. If he had stayed on there, I am sure that the Kemsing village players would have become renowned throughout England.

Perhaps the list of pencilled names of Kemsing children, wishing him good-bye, are among the tenderest relics bequeathed by any part of his life.

"He had a simple and direct way with children," writes his brother, "equally removed from both petting and authoritativeness. His own natural childlikeness came out; and indeed all his life long he preserved the innocence, the impulsiveness, the mingled impatience and docility of a child more than any man I ever saw."

Reference to his work among children occurs almost at once in his letters to his mother, which "give so exactly," she writes to me, "the stir and sparkle of him, and his almost childlike delight at a beginning like that. . . ."

Mr. Skarratt and I do various things. I have not done much visiting yet, but I have been to a few houses with him. But I have begun to teach in the schools, and it is wonderful how different a day school is from a Sunday school. The cane looms behind, and that makes an immense difference. Besides, in this place everyone seems to have a natural awe for clergy. Everybody bobs when they meet me, just as if one was a lord duke riding through tenants' cottages.

By the way, Mr. Skarratt has told me to ride his horses whenever I want. He keeps two lovely black horses. And I have been learning the bicycle. . . . [This letter is much illustrated.]

Preaching, too, was a gift which then began to reveal itself.

"Everything," writes Mr. A. Marshall, "that he said

had been well prepared beforehand, and he did not depart from it, though he seemed to be preaching extemporarily. He spent most of his mornings writing out his sermons and preparing his addresses and school lessons. I would go up sometimes and find him at his desk, which, however, he would occasionally leave to go into another room where there was a piano, or to read a few pages of a book in which he was interested, or for a few minutes' talk. I never remember him at any time so deeply absorbed in his work that he disliked being interrupted or interrupting himself. He had the power of rapid concentration, or he could never have produced the amount that he did afterwards in the midst of all his other activities. When he had written his sermons, I think his system was to read them over several times to get them fixed in his head. But he did not learn them by heart or prepare for any elaborate effects. Nor did he study oratory at all. What eloquence he had was natural to him, and was based upon interest in his subject and his impetuous habit of mind and speech. As his mind became more stored, his need for self-expression greater, and his powers of speech more flexible, he might have been expected, from the signs he then showed, to become a great preacher." [1]

Later on, this developing gift will lead him, after taking part in a parochial Mission, to look to regular mission work under Canon Carter, the Canon Missioner of the diocese. Quite apart from the fact that the Canterbury Chapel, where he would have ministered, was to have none of that ritual which alone, he now believed, adequately expressed the faith he held, his plan came visibly to nothing after half an hour's talk with Archbishop Temple, "kind, but peremptory." He was told he was too young, and he went back to Kemsing.

But well before this the old desire for community life had been taking shape. Mr. Molesworth, as was said

[1] He modelled himself, M. Larpent thinks (though I should say the obedience to a model was unconscious), upon Lacordaire; and Hugh praised the *Vie de Ste. Madeleine* by that writer, "livre faux et pervers," as M. Larpent judges it.

above, had been visiting Little Gidding. To him Benson wrote one or two letters, which I quote almost in full:

THE VICARAGE, KEMSING,
Aug. 26, 1897.

DEAR MOLESWORTH,—Thank you so much for your letter and most interesting account of Little Gidding. How glorious it all sounds! My heart burns within me.

I do wish a brotherhood could be managed there. The ideal would be that the patronage of the living should be vested in trustees—that is the only safeguard. I would come like a shot, after a little longer time here, if you thought there would be a chance of establishing a brotherhood there; and I believe I know two or three people who would come too. But I should have to stop here another year first. Do make inquiries and see what could be done.

One would have to get clear what one's intention would be there. Would it be to work parishes that the Bishop wanted temporary help for—or to take Missions in the diocese—or to make a "Novate Novale,"[1] as there is in the Canterbury and Lincoln and, I think, Truro dioceses; or all three of these things.

Will you really find out about it all, and write to me again. It has been my ideal for years.

I am going down to preach at Canterbury on Sunday evening next. My heart sinks within me—I shall probably be dumb when I get to the pulpit.—Yours ever.

KEMSING VICARAGE, SEVENOAKS,
Oct. 8, 1897.

DEAR MOLESWORTH,—I am sorry about Little Gidding; but on thinking it over, I fancy that I should not be able to go there for a year or two in any case, as I feel I do want more experience and more hard work, physically, before settling down to the life that you describe. I agree with what you say, very much, about the devotional aim of the Society there—a kind of backwater, not in the stagnant, but in the peaceful sense, where people could rest if necessary.

I have been approached with regard to my accepting a living, but I have quite decided not to do so until I

[1] A Society for Mission Priests founded by Archbishop Benson when Chancellor of Lincoln in 1875.

have been at least three years in priest's orders. And that will not be till Christmas year.

Your predecessor is coming down to preach at our Harvest Festival next week. I forget whether you have met him. He is a rock of faith to many rich people in London—extraordinarily holy.

I am tired to death of Harvest Festivals ; I have lately preached at four. They puzzle me dreadfully. At their worst they are purely pagan ; at their best they are a substitute for Corpus Christi Day. For the latter I think they are most useful, as one has really no fixed opportunity for urging the duty of Communion.[1]

The Little Gidding scheme of course fell through (though powerfully stimulated by the example of the Anglican nuns at East Malling, where High Church practices obtained to an extent as yet unexperienced by Hugh), but there was a moment when the possibility of joining a brotherhood founded by Canon Mason suggested itself to him. It was the Community of the Resurrection, however, which finally riveted to itself his aspirations.

This Community had been founded by the present Bishop of Oxford when, as Canon Charles Gore, he was head of the Pusey House there. After a brief sojourn at Radley it migrated to its present home in Yorkshire. At the time of which we are telling, Dr. Gore was living in the Little Cloister, in Westminster, "an oasis," writes M. Larpent, "de prières et d'études dans l'abbaye morte." To him Hugh presented himself as a probationer with the Archbishop's permission to resign his curacy. Some opposition was offered by his family on the grounds of his impulsiveness and inexperience of life and of the

[1] Hugh caricatured this theory of Harvest Festivals in the pitiless sketch of Mr. Stirling in *The Sentimentalists*. Mr. Stirling found that the loaves used at such festivals carried all the "teaching" of Corpus Christi, without its materialistic associations.

ministry. I summarise a letter of the Canon to Mr. A. C. Benson, written on July 9, 1898:

I dare say your estimate of your brother is the true one. . . . I told the Archbishop and your mother that I *preferred* a man to have had more parochial and general experience than your brother has had before coming to us; but that I wished to admit him, partly because of his own strong wish—so strong, it seemed to me, that to refuse him would be an over-great discouragement to him . . . [the Canon insists on this at some length], and partly because I thought he greatly wanted the discipline of study and an ordered life. On this ground the Archbishop allowed him to resign his curacy in order to come to us.

I am sure that he ought to be admitted to a year's probationary discipline. That will be purely to the good. [The vows, he reminds Mr. Benson, are only "yearly," and "our life is very much not an 'enclosed' one."]

I do not think one can take the place of Providence in arranging when, or under what circumstances, sorrow, sin, and failure are to enter into the substance of a man's heart and life. But I would not have you think that our life is sheltered from contact with these as they exist in ordinary human lives.

Mrs. Benson wrote to Mr. A. C. Benson on July 12, 1898, that this letter of Canon Gore's "expresses so much my own feeling in the matter that I probably like it better than you do. It is difficult to see what else Canon Gore could have done, as Hugh is distinctly his own master, and, you see, it doesn't bind him to anything, and it is true he wants 'an ordered life.'"

On the same day M. Larpent wrote to Mr. A. C. Benson a letter which is doubly illuminative, for our knowledge of Hugh, and of Hugh's environment:

July 12, 1898.

My own theological position is extremely orthodox, but as I am an antiquarian, the consequence is that I am extremely moderate in all my views. *Yet*, I should not object in the least to Hugh's opinions or formal sacer-

dotalism and vows of celibacy if your brother could do what Plato calls, *διδόναι λόγον*. . . . If I could convince myself that he has *his own* philosophy of life, *his own* well-reasoned conviction, supported by well-defined arguments, *his own* system of thought and conduct, I should withdraw at once all my objections. What alarms me is that he has made up his mind, and does not give the reason of his determination. Of course he gives some reasons, but I do not feel that they are his own.

I am sorry he is not sensitive and receives advice with complete *ῥᾳθυμία*. When I saw him at Kemsing I implored him to spend a few years quietly reading some of the books which the Archbishop left him. I wanted him to do a Cyprian of *his own*. But he reads not! I deeply love him, and I am greatly honoured by the confidence which he places in me, but I feel powerless. You are quite right in not doing more than you have done. He must try that sort of life. But between you and me, my dear friend, it is distressing to see that his quest of celibacy will after all be decided after a short novitiate. It involves the philosophy of a whole life. I do not know Gore. I hope he will not advise *ἐν κύβοις*. . . .

P.S.—Of course you fully realise what a consolation it would have been for me if I had found in him a student's mind! He might have begun a great work, the work of a whole life, and I should have been so happy to help him at the beginning! Fancy studying Tertullian with him, or Augustine! The personal grief is real, but after all I want him to be happy and follow *his own* way.

Hugh had refused a good offer of a living, explaining to his brother that he needed discipline, was far too comfortable, and was going to succeed in missionary rather than in pastoral work.

His brother asked him, in return, whether

he might not perhaps find the discipline he needed in doing the pastoral work which did not interest him, rather than in developing his life on lines which he preferred. . . . But I did not understand Hugh at this date. It is always a strain to find one whom one has always regarded as a boy, almost as a child, holding strong and definitely matured

views. I thought him self-absorbed and wilful—as indeed he was—but he was pursuing a true instinct and finding his real life.[1]

Still, from Hugh's own letters, it may be, we shall obtain the best expression of that point of view, at least, which he offered to the public. He wrote—the letter has no date—to his brother:

. . . Thank you very much for your letter about my going in. I certainly agree that in a very large number of cases a call is contrary to inclination. On the other hand, is not a parochial life also a matter of call? It seems to me that the clerical life is either a married life or a community life. I feel from every conceivable point of view that I am not called to a married life—the neutral ground that lies between that and a community life is as equally impossible—and to me, therefore, the community life seems normal, not abnormal at all. I do not quite see why it should be regarded as abnormal by everyone. It is not the monastic life proper, but the secular, surrounded with peculiar aids to devotion and study. . . . And the fact that one's inclination is on the same side is scarcely a solid argument against it. To use it as an argument reminds me of a certain sentence in *Arthur Hamilton*,[2] that persecution is not a proof that God is on our side. I mean the fact that a life is pleasurable is no indication either way very much. . . . I will do my best to disentangle what I want from what I will.

Finally, to Mr. Molesworth he wrote as follows:

THE VICARAGE, KEMSING,
July 22, 1898.

MY DEAR MOLESWORTH, . . . I am not sure whether I told you of my future plans. It is now finally settled that I enter as a probationer in the Community of the Resurrection at the end of September. I go into retreat with the brethren on the 26th, and then go with them to Mir-

[1] *Hugh*, p. 92.

[2] *Arthur Hamilton* was a book written by Mr. A. C. Benson in 1887 under the pseudonym "Christopher Carr."

field. It seems to me that this Community entirely satisfies one's desires. They are not so rigid as Cowley; there seems to be a more family spirit among them; and I admire Canon Gore, the Superior, extremely.

I have often wondered whether your thoughts had ever turned to that Community.

May I ask your prayers for me in this new life?

Here we are in a great fuss and hurry—another children's pantomime coming off next week—and the house is full of dresses and golden crowns. I hope it will go off well.

Things go on here much as usual. I am terribly sorry to leave, for some reasons, but have no doubt that I am doing right.

There is undoubtedly distinct discipline at Mirfield, and I don't know how far one will stand it. This house is extraordinarily pleasant, but extraordinarily undisciplined. No particular rules for anything in the world. It will be a sharp change.

The world is rather tumbling about me altogether. The priest to whom I go to confession is getting married, and I am wondering whether I shall continue to go to him. I fancy not—particularly, as I shall be up in the north for so long.

Do send me a line to wish me well.

I think too much fuss is being made about this "Crisis" in the Church. I don't believe a "Crisis" exists at all; and if it does, whatever of it does, certainly is all for the good, and leads to sobriety and quietness. Personally I should not be overwhelmed with sorrow if a few priests seceded to Rome. It would be bitter for the moment, but, I have no doubt, would lead to more fruit in the future, as to respect for authority.—Ever yours,

HUGH BENSON.

Hugh therefore left the pleasant places of the south for the unlovely Yorkshire town. He went in search of discipline to a house which he was destined to leave in pursuit of an authority yet more comprehensive. Kemsing, with its delightful occupations, was allowing him, he felt, to squander himself almost as a man of grosser bent wastes himself over pleasure. Mirfield will be unable to provide

for his intellect that direction which its restless, yet timorous character demands. He leaves the village where his individualism had perhaps had too free a scope, and his self-development had risked turning into self-indulgence: he must plunge into community existence and sink his aggressive personality in the general life. Yet none can say that at Mirfield he succeeded in reducing himself to "type": perhaps at Mirfield, and indeed there especially, there was no type to which the orthodox should conform. Certainly Hugh never became typical of anything at Mirfield, any more than he had been one in type with Mr. Skarratt, M. Larpent, or, earlier, Mr. St. Clair Donaldson or Dean Vaughan. With all the enthusiasm, but with less than the pain which Francis Thompson prophesies for the artist, "he lived his life; he lived *his* life."

CHAPTER VII

MIRFIELD, 1898–1903

Quelque chose de calme, de pauvre et de fort enveloppe la colline. Tout est clair et parle sans artifice à l'âme. . . .

Et la chapelle répond :

— Je suis la règle, l'autorité, le lien ; je suis un corps de pensées fixes et la cité ordonnée des âmes.

— J'agiterai ton âme, continue la prairie. Ceux qui viennent me respirer se mettent à poser des questions.

Mais la chapelle nous dit :

— Visiteurs de la prairie, apportez-moi vos rêves pour que je les épure, vos élans pour que je les oriente.

MAURICE BARRÈS (*La Colline Inspirée*).

I

THE house to which Hugh went in September, 1898, is built on the high ridge which faces south across the valley of the Calder. Mirfield is on the junction of the London and North-Western and the Lancashire and Yorkshire Railways ; other lines run through it : Leeds, Huddersfield, Wakefield, Bradford, surround it. Over the whole landscape, save when rains have washed it, a film of soot has settled. In rain itself, it is dismal beyond words. Yet the scene has its fascination. At sunrise, Turner would have worshipped it ; in almost any weather, Whistler would have loved its fugitive effects. At night, the whole valley is romantic with the green and crimson lamps of signals and the rush of trains. There are spring or autumn afternoons when the sunlight, quivering in the birch and mountain-ash trees, numerous all around, transfigures the whole country-side. Benson, like all artists, was

sensitively aware of the qualities and variations of light.[1] "It is a divine spring evening," he writes from Mirfield in April, 1902, ". . . all smoky and hazy in brilliant sunshine. I love days like these."

As you climb the long hill from Mirfield or Battyeford station, it is the dark red stonework of the unfinished Community church which you first meet upon your left, projecting towards the hill-face. This Benson never saw. Below are the buildings of the Theological College, which were begun during his stay at Mirfield. Then comes the house itself, approached through lodge-gates by a drive. It was built by an opulent mill-owner, and its architecture is entirely characteristic of the district. The Fathers have to submit to walls of a pale stone which blackens rapidly; slate roofs; windows surcharged with ornament, and porches flanked by columns of a livid-coloured marble. The new refectory and the added wings for guest-house or for retreats, are of rougher stonework, and in a Perpendicular style at once more simple, more graceful, and more dignified.

Solidity and warmth, however, cannot be denied to the older building: the entrance hall, with its staircase and gallery, are generously designed; the corridors and rooms are in no way unlike those of most modern religious houses which have been added to bit by bit.

The house, then, is fenced off from the road by the orthodox flower-beds, lawn, and trees; on the valley side, a terrace is succeeded by fields and then woods as far as

[1] Perhaps his consciousness of light was developed by *John Inglesant*. Often you will find Shorthouse's phrases almost verbally reproduced by him, especially when it is the "mellow radiance" of afternoon which soothes him, or the light, held, as it were, in solution by the air of dawn, which intoxicates him. But his father too had had this sympathy with light. He is always noticing, and noting, it. In his diary, 23rd March 1850 has this only entry: "The strange light on the old Court after Evensong."

what is a genuine cliff-face of rock, and, at one point of this, confronting the seething life beneath it like any Calvary of Breton or Spanish coast, stands a tall crucifix. To the left lies a quarry, and to the right the ground falls rapidly into a kind of pocket in the hill, and here, surrounded on all sides by rocks and trees and brambles, no sign of human interference anywhere visible, a man might in a moment put himself into retreat. That Hugh came here often is certain, since he went to the trouble of making a path and steps up to the higher levels, still called "Hugh's Path" by those who remember it, for, with the cutting of a wider track, the use and the memory of the humbler stair are disappearing, and the work he did upon the hillside is half hidden by the brambles.

Below all this lie the road, the blackened river, the canal, the branching railways, the huddled stony town. Then the valley rises into its further slope.

Within the house Hugh Benson found, doubtless, the discipline he needed, and yet in no sense an austerity of life which quenched his spirit. Modern religious congregations tend, I suppose, to increasing the rigidity of their original organisation rather than relaxing it; and Mirfield, which to-day is Lazarist, so to say, in tone, was then (as a Cowley Father put it) Oratorian rather than monastic, and was animated by a family spirit which, with the gradual strengthening of its tissues, has not wholly evaporated.

The Community in Hugh's time rose at 6.15; at 6.50 the Prayer-book office of Mattins was recited, followed by a version of Prime. At 7.15 the Eucharist was celebrated by one member only of the Community, for, in the intention of the Mirfield Fathers, the social aspect of the common Oblation is thus emphasized. Breakfast

followed, in silence; Terce was said at 8.45, Meditation followed at 9.0. This was made, as a rule, in the Chapel or in private rooms; Hugh characteristically preferred the garden. Dinner at 1.15 followed Sext at 1.0; tea was after None at 4.15. Evensong was said at 7.0; supper was at 7.30, Compline at 9.45, and the lights were officially extinguished at 10.

This was the order of Hugh's day, and it has not been altered substantially in our own. Its setting, however, at least as far as the religious services are concerned, has changed considerably. In May, 1902, a new chapel was being made, Hugh's own room with two others being thrown into one for that purpose. When the big church was sufficiently advanced, the Community resorted to it for their devotions, and these are now said in a special chapel there. When it is completed, chapels of the Nativity, the Holy Cross, the Resurrection, the Ascension, and the Holy Spirit, will make a crown about the High Altar; to-day, only one other altar, that to which Hugh, in the old chapel, was accustomed, stands in the nave. A plaster statue of Mary holds forth the Divine Child for worship, and lights flicker before the crucifix. In this sombre, somewhat Byzantine church, the *usus Anglicanus* obtains, which is not exactly Sarum (a ritual to be seen in its splendour at, for instance, St. Agnes, Kennington), but is accurately based, we learn, upon the use in a majority of pre-Reformation English parishes. Hence artists among the brethren can satisfy their eye with vestments of rich penitential blue; and Lenten white, too, is noticeable at Mirfield. Hugh designed two altar-cloths in these tinctures: the white one bears upon it the heraldry of the Passion, *appliqué* in sombre red; the field is *goutté* with great drops of blood. Over the crimson

background of the other spreads a great tree of life in blue; the same escutcheons hang from its branches, and the legend tells how the tree of death has borne a fruit of life. This ritual itself developed slowly. Coloured vestments came in owing to Benson's help; the Lambeth "opinions" governed the use of incense; a sanctuary lamp was lighted, annoyingly, to Benson's logical view, for it shone sentry to no tabernacle.

Silence was more strictly observed, as in most Catholic communities, from the end of evening "recreation" till after breakfast. On the other hand, there was no rule for the putting out of private lights; and it was jokingly said that in the morning nothing in the world would get Hugh out of bed "but the sound of one of the Fathers saying his prayers in the bathroom." From breakfast to dinner "lesser silence" was to be observed; that is, conversation was to be brief and on necessary subjects. With all the good-will in the world, Hugh never could carry this out. His neighbour's door would be agitatedly opened, with or without a knock. Hugh, who had just written something he liked, or in whose brain some sudden idea had taken fascinating shape, would invade the worker. "I say, just l-l-listen to this. . . . I say, isn't this r-r-ripping." "Hush-sh," would come the answer. "Yes, I *know*," Hugh would urge, "but l-look here . . . just *one* minute." And the excited talk went forward.

After dinner, the probationer would retreat to his room with one or two special friends, and then, over the fire, "discuss the situation," as he called it. Certainly his tongue was sharper than he allowed it to be in later years; yet he was noticeable for his unaffected geniality and good-will. Much tobacco, in the shape of halved cigarettes, soothed his nerves, till he resolved to rid himself of this

chain. He chewed seeds, and all manner of strings and straws, to make up for the companionable drug. "By the way," he wrote, half-way through 1902, "I am giving up smoking. Haven't smoked a whiff for four weeks. But I won't swear it is for ever." Indeed it was not. From Rome he will write that he considers himself as good as "cured"; he only smokes one cigarette or so a day. Before he dies it will be thirty or even fifty.

After the conversation, exercise. He plays a childish cricket, and fives in the stable-yard. He was a difficult person to play against, one of his companions told me plaintively. He was an expert; and, when one failed to make one's stroke, he jeered, and quickly became "purely vituperative." This exuberance of spirits found an outlet, too, in rapid walks and much digging up of plantains on the lawn. "Come and d-dig!" he used suddenly to say, when the silence got on his nerves; and, in flannels and an immense straw hat, he wrestled with the weeds, piously termed by him "original sin," for mere human effort found them ineradicable. A baptism of acid was devised, but proved inefficacious, and they still are there. He dug, too, the path mentioned above, and steps down to the quarry; and in September, 1902, he wrote to a friend in India:

> It is good for people to dig, I believe. I am almost superstitious about that—good for their characters, I mean—you feel that you have reached fundamentals when you are sweating over a spade and your hands are sore.
>
> I would include that kind of thing in the education of every boy I had to do with. Talking of education, there is a real row on, and the Dissenters are really behaving exceedingly badly—lying right and left. They have degenerated shockingly—quite unlike their forefathers.

The whimsically spiritual interpretation, and the evocation, by a word, of an idea else not associated with his theme, are wholly characteristic.

Beside these labours of love, a certain amount of housework was general. The brethren made beds, broke coal, cleaned boots. For dress, they wore a loose cassock with a leather belt; and though the head of the Community, as long as Dr. Gore held that position, was known as "Senior," the name "Superior" soon came in, and the other priests were called "Fathers," in modern fashion. Benson strongly urged this change. A monastic element, too, was noticeable in the weekly "Chapter," when faults against the Rule were confessed publicly by the brethren on their knees.

At Christmas, Father Benson sent to his mother a number of "Christmas Cards" sketched in pen and coloured chalks upon half-sheets of notepaper. The rather chill buildings of the monastery figure twice, and are more seriously drawn; most of the sketches are humorous, and display, in kindly caricature, the daily occupations of the Fathers. A sturdy "Hebdomadarius," in black coat over his fluttering nightshirt, hair touselled, feet red-slippered, jangles his bell down the bleak corridor; cassocked figures shave in bathrooms; carry brooms and pails down the same green-doored passages; sit, with heads plunged in newspapers, in an austere breakfast-room, or bowed above theological treatises in the library, or hasten, "late again," towards the relentless door. For "dissipation," they are pictured as playing battledore and shuttlecock over a clothes-line hung with newspapers for nets, cassocks temporarily laid aside, or, three by three, with uplifted finger pointing their theological debate, patrolling the village street, where the very dogs pause to

contemplate the pious spectacle. "An Appalling Scene in a Modern Religious House" seems to display the "walling-up" of some refractory monk by two British workmen, shocked and stolid respectively; black-habited inquisitors in the background urge on the work.[1] In two mysterious companion drawings, a bishop is first seen, writing his "charge" at a table on an overhanging and crumbling mountain ledge. A workman with a gun, and a black-coated, top-hatted figure—is he a Nonconformist minister? —holding a huge life-preserver, stand behind him. A distant Pope beckons another layman and a birretta'd priest to Rome. In the second picture, the workman has fired, his companion has hurled his life-preserver, the rock has split, and the Bishop with all his paraphernalia is sent flying. From afar, on the road to Rome, two tiny figures look back to the catastrophe.

These relics have their pathos. They may serve, too, to show that Hugh could stand back and see himself and his companions in all the quaintnesses incidental to their nobly-chosen life, and could defy all alien laughter by having been himself the first to laugh; and, best of all, that in his own laughter there was no slightest note of bitterness; his caricature is of the kindliest; the desire to *hurt* never stirred within him; he was, for the time, at his happy ease in the Mirfield Sion.

This first year was almost wholly spent in prayer and study, though we find traces of slight external activity. He gives a lantern lecture on the Holy Land in aid of the "Jerusalem Fund," and foresees another on Egypt, for

[1] An unfinished sketch, called "Paid by the Day," shows another group of workmen drawn with a genuine sense of character, value of line, and firmness of touch. The rest are still the work of a clever schoolboy with quick eye and supple though untrained hand.

which he will have to "read up Baedeker."[1] And on March 1, 1899, he writes to the Rev. J. H. Molesworth, apropos of a recent Anglican controversy :

> We English bark a great deal. It is better than vicious snarling. I really do not think there is very much *vice* on either side, though a terrible lot of dust and noise. We shall all be sitting with our tongues lolling out presently, smiling at one another. I am barking in my poor way at my Men's Bible Class ; but they won't bark back—they only grin like a dog, and take it admirably.

His strictly theological and historical studies we shall describe later : in literary works of two or three departments he was always interested.

During his years at Mirfield the books he mentions are, of course, *John Inglesant*, and with this, what became for him a kind of pagan Inglesant, Walter Pater's *Marius the Epicurean;* and, indeed, quite apart from the somewhat similar pilgrimage traced by these two young men, singularly refined, sensitive, and open to religious experiences in either case, towards the practice of Catholicism and of Christianity respectively, as magical a light broods over that picture of the Rome of the Antonines as upon the England of John's day, and few can escape the glamour diffused by Pater's prose.

"I read *Marius the Epicurean*," he writes, "in the holidays—for the first time, I am ashamed to say. What a marvellous book it is ! I desire to be a pagan." He turns this off lightly, with an allusion to an old professor in Athens, relegated to an asylum because he offered sacrifice and incense to Apollo and Athene in his domestic lararium—"a really charming old man, I expect" ; but the

[1] Not till next year did he give, with the Rev. C. Bickersteth, an itinerant mission in Cornwall, playing devil's advocate to his companion's expositions of dogma, though some assign it to 1899. Here is the motor-mission foreshadowed.

influence went deep, and, when a Catholic in Rome, he will passionately beg that *Marius* may be sent him, in any form, from England.[1]

He loves this mixture of realism and glamour. In the spring of 1902 he had been to *Ulysses* at His Majesty's. Stephen Phillips, he considers, is

> really good . . . he writes always on the large, simple human emotions—such as homesickness and jealousy of the simplest kinds—and isn't in the least elaborate or subtle; and his words are suitable—large common words carefully arranged.
>
> It was charming to get into complete unreality again.

In keeping with the last sentence is the following, written the same year:

> I have been reading Maeterlinck much lately. Do read every line of him you can lay your hands on, but above all his plays. They are wonderful—very morbid and odd and French, but really moving, not like Ibsen's fiddling stuff.

I am quite sure that, had he seen Ibsen acted, the horrible heresy he here expressed would have been renounced. His love for Maeterlinck, on the other hand, had he seen *Pelléas et Mélisande* when he was taught to appreciate Debussy, would probably have grown firmer. As it was, he wrote in June, 1903:

> I have read a lot of things lately—Maeterlinck, for example. He is, I believe, a sort of fever that one catches and recovers from; but my temperature has been rather high about him for some time; and shows no lowering. He seems to me a writer full of extraordinarily delicate

[1] "I am slowly tasting *Marius* through once more. What a book! And would you kindly, sometime, state your views as to *John Inglesant?* I find that a master-key to people. Or, in another metaphor, it precipitates a solution." He wrote this in 1905.

perceptions. The very dullest things become significant, with him to describe them. I wonder whether you agree at all.

He had also been reading, "very mildly," George Sand; whose name everybody "seems to have babbled from their cradle upwards, except me." She too, he finds, transfigures the commonplace; but not like Maeterlinck, by making you feel that there are huge, mysterious Powers behind, but by making the very things and characters *themselves* interesting, quite apart from their "significance" and "symbolism."

Huysmans too, and to a lesser extent Zola, seemed to him to achieve this transfiguring effect, though Huysmans did it the more easily, as he "puts the whole thing into a mystical frame." He knew, but had not, I think, read his *Là-bas*, nor Zola's less reputable works. In consequence it is hard to gather which of the latter author's books he could have seen, save, probably, *Lourdes*, and possibly *Le Rêve;* later, he read more of Huysmans beside *La Cathédrale*, including *Là-bas*, though he resisted for a long time. At last he yielded to the argument that, as a priest (especially if interested, as he was, by Satanism and the morbidities of worship), he ought to. He bitterly reproached his counsellor; his visualising brain tormented him with the pictures of impiety it had offered, and his crucifix, at Mass, became for a time a torment. I do not think he ever read *A Rebours*. Had he done so, or even its English legatee, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, his character-drawing in *The Sentimentalists* might have been done with a firmer hand. *Sir Richard Calmady*, too, was a book with definitely morbid elements on which he found his views too complicated to write.

Not that his reading had throughout this sicklied cast.

He thoroughly liked Kipling, and studied *On the Heels of De Wet*, though this depressed him, and he found the Boer War "a dingy affair"; he was "thankful for one's country's credit that it has somehow managed to stop." His sense of humour was often riotous: he "laughs himself sick" over stories which he records, sometimes twice, in letters, to the same person, and which need his inimitable telling to seem comical; and he had an unchastened taste in Limericks. His love for the occult is still there:

"We told ghost stories," he writes to India in May 1902, "last night till prayer-time—and I nearly had a fit with fright when I found myself alone in my room—with ghostly curtains round my bed [an absurd goblin is sketched in the margin, peering between two curtains]. I expected them to be parted by bony fingers, and a face to look through. And there were curious thumpings in the hall at 11 P.M. that terrified me.

"My eldest brother has lately written some mystical stories which he has asked me to criticise.[1] They are quite fascinating. Do you like that kind of thing? Or are you too stegling and blowsy and healthy?"

Later on an attempt will be made to judge how far he took these impressions seriously, and how far he laughed at himself and them. Certainly, at this very time his healthful love for animals was as keen as ever.

"Last week," he wrote on March 11, 1902, "I went to the Zoo with my brother. We had a splendid time—tipped keepers, and were taken behind the scenes. We had a cheetah's cage opened and scratched his head, and conversed with a perfectly mad lion who was being kept in the dark. We tapped his cage from outside, and he positively foamed with rage and banged against the iron plate. It was like touching a button and letting off an explosion instantly. Then an ape spat at us insolently several times. . . . It is a most fascinating place."

[1] *The Hill of Trouble.*

He also went to hear some music "as recreation," but chiefly wants more Zoo, and spends lunch-time in the South Kensington Museum with the stuffed birds, and a little later gleefully writes :

We are going to have a dog at last! I am so pleased—an Irish terrier, and we have lately grown a rabbit on the estate—I am afraid they won't hit it off too well. He is a real wild rabbit who has appeared, and who feeds on the lawn in the evening. But I yearn for a parrot—that would put the gilded pinnacle on my hopes.

The Irish terrier used to sleep under Father Benson's bed, and developed "a passion for flies whom[1] he eats in a gentlemanly manner off my window-pane. But they are not good for him." Yielding, however, to a darker passion for poaching, the dog, to Hugh's grief, had shortly to be got rid of.

Yet even in the innocent life of bird and beast he would not refuse the stimulus to dwell on the uncanny. From Tremans, one July, he wrote that he had been listening to

owls hooting and snoring at night. I love the sense of mystery that owls give one. We used to sit out and watch them after dinner, going like cruel ghosts after mice. Once or twice they appeared against the west sky, silhouetted, with a mouse in their claws.

Of literary work during this first period, I doubt whether he did any (save, of course, the preparation of sermons and the like) other than the edition of his father's Prayers and Services.

He had begun this before actually going to Mirfield, and a letter from Mrs. Benson survives in which she begs him to submit the manuscript to some one of a liturgical temperament who was also an intimate friend

[1] Is it childish to notice the personifying pronoun?

of the Archbishop's, and suggests Canon Mason, as having been "inside." He was helped, too, by the Rev. J. Julian, who wrote the notes to the Archbishop's hymns and translations in the famous *Dictionary of Hymnology* from information received direct from their author. The book appeared to his friends, as in the Preface he surmised it might, somewhat miscellaneous, not alone from the nature of its contents — public prayers and offices, private prayers, hymns—but from the somewhat vague and perfunctory character of the notes. Perhaps the book was rather rushed. Possibly the son lacked, not the admiration for the liturgy, but the scholarly knowledge of ancient prayer-forms which the father so amply possessed. None the less the book has a permanent value as throwing light on certain aspects of the Archbishop's piety with which the English public, a very unliturgical body—certainly not likely to think of praying in Greek at any rate—could not, probably, be familiar.

Of his spiritual and even intellectual development during this period little evidence is available. A small black note-book contains accurate outlines of all the Quiet Days and Retreats he made while at Mirfield, from January 4, 1899, onwards. But these are strictly *résumés* of the "points" explained by the giver of the Retreat, and, though interesting as a proof of the lofty ideal and of the mystical method set before the exercitant, they contain no hint of Hugh Benson's personal reflections or conclusions. The names of Fathers Bull, Sampson, Nash, Frere, and, especially, Charles Gore, recur at the head of these pages; and it is to their biographies that an account of these ascetical exercises would properly belong. In themselves, these "days of recollection" and

retreats differ in no substantial way from those to which Catholics are accustomed. Another note-book contains Meditations on the sacerdotal life and spirit, arranged for ten days. They are built strictly on the Ignatian lines; two preludes, three points, and a colloquy. These, I confess, seem to me, from purely internal and stylistic qualities, to be, if not original, at least written down more freely according to Hugh's own temperamental dictates.[1] "Intercessions" were a regular feature of Mirfield life, and followed Sext. This habit of regular and official "intercession" left a lifelong impress upon Hugh. Certainly it stimulated his interest in Miss H. M. Kyle's book, *Bands of Love*, spoken of below, and inspired his last small volume, *Vexilla Regis*, written after the outbreak of war in 1914. In a small prayer-book entitled *Sursum Corda*, by Mrs. A. L. Illingworth and the Rev. W. H. Frere, and brought out on October 20, 1898, to which the present Bishop of Winchester had written a preface, he notes down the main anniversaries of his life, and adds lists of initials, partly of persons, partly of pious enterprises, to the schemes of intercession included in the prayer-book. He inserts prayers to Mary for the Holy Souls, a picture of Our Lady, and a naïvely painted Chalice and Host for frontispiece; and it is clear that his prayer-life is already fully Catholic.[2] In fact, he tells us so himself in his *Confessions* (p. 67), adding that he said his Rosary regularly. This, I should indicate, neither was nor is a regular Mirfield custom, but a practice

[1] The Rev. G. W. Hart reassures me that they were practically original.

[2] Three sermons belonging to this period survive: on Christmas, and its implied reversal of human standards of judging; on the corporate life of the Church; on the law of retribution. They are written throughout, with additions, but practically no erasures. Their theology is orthodox; their style still contains too much of the "And nextly," "And then again," of the conventional preacher to be attractive.

which, if not forbidden to the individual, would not be encouraged, still less officially sanctioned.

Hugh Benson had been admitted as Probationer, with the Rev. Samuel Healy, who remained his very intimate friend, on October 4, 1898.[1] By July, 1899, therefore, the year of Probation was running out, and the question of Profession rose above the horizon. By Profession was meant the taking of the three standard vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience, understood in this sense, that the candidate made a solemn promise to observe the rule of the Community for thirteen months, and declared his intention of remaining in the Order for life. These vows then contained no more essential permanency than did this intention: if this should flag, no dispensation was necessary, but departure could take place automatically at the end of the period of months. It could also be allowed, imposed, or refused before this. The vow of obedience was understood in the usual way: external obedience was required, save when conscience genuinely protested; interior obedience was expected within the limits imposed by each man's psychic temperament. By chastity, celibacy was meant. There was no suggestion, I gather, that marriage attempted in defiance of this vow was null and void.[2] Poverty implied that a man's capital remained intact to him, but his income was handed over to the Community. The dictum, moreover, *Quidquid monachus acquirit, monasterio acquirit,* was recognised: books written at Mirfield remained a source of revenue to the house;

[1] This is the feast of St. Francis of Assisi, to whom he had from these early days a genuine devotion. He regarded him as the pattern of that childlikeness and simplicity for which, as his letters show, he was constantly praying.

[2] Mirfield, a lady penitent of Hugh's considered, was "a sort of prison where clergymen are made to do as they are told, and generally humbugged." "No," Father Benson answered, "I am a monk, and cannot marry." I fancy this sarcasm was quite unconscious.

thus, *The Light Invisible* proved lucrative long after its author's disappearance. Beth, Mr. A. C. Benson tells us,[1] used to make him little presents, and "at intervals lament his state of destitution." "I can't bear to think of the greedy creatures taking away all the gentlemen's things."

In 1899, however, Benson did not feel himself in a mood suited to profession. He continued, therefore, experimenting, and embarked upon a life fuller of external work than he had hitherto attempted. From almanacks and letters it would be almost possible to reconstitute the list of places that he visited. After his retreat at Selwyn College, Cambridge, from September 11th to 15th, it is Harvest Festivals and isolated sermons in the neighbourhood of Mirfield that are at first noted; he preaches twice in the open air near Huddersfield; and gives a Mission of one week at St. John's Church, Sevenoaks. During it he preached daily to children at 9 A.M.; at Evensong at 5.30; and a special Mission sermon and instruction at 8.30 P.M. From November 6 to 23 he spent his holiday chiefly, I think, at Tremans. No engagement-book for 1900 seems to survive; but his apostolic experiences during this and the following years had nothing of peculiar interest; they increased steadily in number, and became probably more definitely "revivalistic" in character. They are, in fact, often enough actually called "Revival Weeks"; he deliberately read Talmage[2] before preaching, in order to "work himself up;" and the mingling of Catholic dogma with Evangelistic fervour (which caused a certain clergyman to delight him by speaking of his preaching as half Wesleyan, half Romanist) remained with him, in a chastened fashion, all his life. He used gestures at this period far more than ever he did as a Catholic, and

[1] *Hugh*, p. 97.

[2] The famous American Evangelical preacher.

envied one of his colleagues[1] his amazing power of positively *acting* the Passion story as he told it.

There is no doubt that he enjoyed his variegated life to the full. He exults, often enough, in the prospect of returning to the peace of Mirfield, but after a fortnight's stay there he would grow restless. He gleefully writes round, in December, 1901, that he is staying in the Bank of England at Manchester, "for four sermons at St. Ann's." These followed a revival week at Wellingborough, and from January 19, 1902, he will have continuous work till Easter. On January 25 of that year he writes to his friend in India:

> I am working like two horses; and whenever I have not anything else to do, sleep heavily in a chair. An endless vista of work stretches up to Easter, talking and talking. Just at present I am on a mission in a little country church—dull, heavy people who sit and stare and then go away dazed. They need an earthquake, and I can't give it them. I think I shall bust before I have done.

He describes the country rectory with enthusiasm—an old spired church at the back—

> with tombs and Easter sepulchres and aumbreys and piscinæ—and all the rest. But it smells of the dead——and there I stand and rave three times a day at least. Southend is only a mile or two off, with its *beastly* parade and pier and band.

This lament over popular indifference recurs, in his correspondence, almost like a refrain.

On August 22, 1902, the Rev. G. H. S. Walpole (now Bishop of Edinburgh) wrote to him:

> . . . I should be appalled (if I saw it more clearly) at the general indifference to the existence of a spiritual world.

[1] The Rev. S. Healy.

To some, not vicious people, I believe it would be a positive relief if I could announce next Sunday that there was no such hope. As for any realisation of danger in sitting thus loosely and carelessly I see not a trace. The opinion Carlyle is credited with, is, I expect, widely common. "As for Jesus, he was a good young man disgusted with the shams and hypocrisies of his time which his soul couldn't abide." And yet such people are pleasant, agreeable, and interesting, very likeable and very much amused when the parson gets hot and presses home conviction.

In March Benson writes again:

Work is accumulating very much. I have engagements for nearly two years ahead—and feel as if I were caught in a machine and were being slowly drawn in. Do you know that sensation? The only thing to do is not to think about it.

But the "treadmill sensation" is often enough alluded to by him. Already on December 6, 1901, he had written:

The thing that one finds most trying in this work is the fact that one has to be "on the spot" every time. One can't do it in a routine sort of way. If one is just in a kind of dull level, one had better not be there. Parochial clergy can make up for a slack fit afterwards—and we can't. That really is a great strain. One gets to a place and has instantly to be at full steam and remain so until one goes—and that is trying to body and soul.[1]

None the less, when his activities could take on the colour of an adventure, even unpleasant, he revived. Open-air preaching was at once terrifying and exciting to him. In the July of 1902 he wrote:

This month we begin preaching in the Quarry: and I am terrified to know that I have to take Sunday week. We have a brass band—and other pranks.

[1] In this same letter he alludes to a grievance destined to prove lasting: "X. looks a lot older. I wish I did: I have been informed of my youthful appearance twice to-day—and the second time by an aged man with a long beard—which especially annoys me."

On September 25, he was just back from Lincoln:

tired to death. Street-preaching every evening—followed by a sermon, &c., in church. We had such large and attentive crowds. The colliers stopped at once the very smallest attempt at disturbance; and then a good many followed us into church.

An interesting sidelight is thrown upon his work at this time by the Rev. C. Hart, now of St. Ninian's, Whitby:

"I went," he writes, "on a Mission with him to St. Patrick's, Birmingham, in 1902. I remember how he dreaded it beforehand and was nervous; how he semi-hypnotised three young fellows who came in one night and sat in the front row to sneer; how he gave out the hymn, 'Faith of our Fathers,' with this appended remark: 'By those fathers I do not mean Cranmer, Ridley, Latimer, and that kind of person!' Probably nobody in the congregation except the clergy had heard of any of those divines. At the same Mission, after a few days of seeming failure, the people began to come up in flocks night by night, quite steady and unexcited, to renew their baptismal vows; and he and I spent the last few days of the fortnight in church all day long seeing penitents, and only making flying visits to the clergy-house to snatch cups of tea. I can also remember being upset at first to find that after some very powerful and earnest sermon, he would at once adjourn to the house and begin reading a 'shilling shocker' with all his might; but I found that it was his way of giving a sedative to his brain, and that if he had not done something of the kind, he would have been too much excited to sleep, and so the next day's work would have suffered."

He expresses a preference he was destined to mortify often enough in late years:

I agree absolutely about bazaars. They are terrible—they are dishonest—undignified—silly—and, above all, tiresome beyond words. If I was going to give to an object, I would much rather give, than be swindled. I can't see the attraction at all.

If I may venture an opinion upon this period of external activity, it shall be that within it all he is making definite progress towards the spiritual and the interior. At first there are too many letters of the following description:

Jan. 26, 1900.

. . . St. Paul's was quite gorgeous. Five copes! [There follows the quaintest sketch of four beehive-like personages approaching a candled altar.] Four of the copees had not anything particular to do, but the fifth, Canon K——, was celebrant. Beethoven in C: "O Saving Victim" (Gounod), "Hail, Festal Day" (Minor), and "Urbs beata." I nearly wept for joy. Two altar lights and two standards —a fairly large orchestra who went out in processions like the "Hegemoth" or something of King David. A vast congregation with *comparatively* few communicants.

The following card was written (in a Latin emancipated from any obligation, it would seem, of following "*ut* final" by the subjunctive) from Market Harboro' on March 22, 1901:

Gratias tibi ago, frater, pro epistola tua, hodie accepta. Moeror praesertim de doloribus tuis: sed equidem tam defessus sum ut tibi, etiam, invideo. Catarrham etiam in capite tam tumefactam ut mortuus esse desidero.

Omnia spiritualia tamen bene satis progrediuntur. De Poenitentia elocutus, pavidus sum, sed poenitentes et salutem esurientes expecto. Processiones per vias, non sine cruce luminibusque, furorem populi excitaverunt: nec sine lictore in pacem servandam procedebamus. Sed, benedictione Dei et protectione B.V.M. et Patroni Hugonis omniumque Sanctorum salvi fuimus e iracundia protestantum: et omnia tranquilla sunt. Ora, frater, pro nobis.—H. B.[1]

[1] Thank you, brother, for your letter, received to-day. I am especially sorry for your woes; but on my side I am so tired that I actually envy you. [I have] too a cold in my head, so stuffed up that I wish I were dead.

However, all spiritual business is going on well enough. I spoke on Penance, and am very frightened; but I am expecting penitents and men hungry for salvation. Processions through the streets, not without cross and lights, excited the

There is still too much of the young ritualist about this, who feels himself playing at a rather naughty game, calculated to tease the rival clique.

Together with this rather frivolous preoccupation with ritual went what I can only allude to at the risk of hurting those for whom Benson himself felt, and expressed, a lifelong admiration and gratitude. That I should feel a little uneasy about the attitude of these missioners (in those early days) towards the practice of Confession, implies no kind of reflection upon the utter sincerity and self-devotion of the Mirfield confessors, nor do I want to attribute any essential value to the personal impression left on me by the letters of this period. Still, I cannot forget Benson's own description of the first confession he ever heard: how he led the unlucky Eton boy who made it into the Kemsing church, locked the door, "trembling with excitement, heard the confession, and then went back to the house with a sense of awful and splendid guilt."[1] Possibly. To defy Church authorities in ritual may indeed savour of naughtiness and, at times, of flippancy; but to enter a Confessional, unprepared, unsanctioned, no question of examination, of faculties, or jurisdiction having even been raised, might indeed provoke a sense of guilt, though scarcely "splendid." The touch of excitement is felt in all these letters, that anxiously ask "How many confessions did you hear?" "Did you shrive anyone?" "Above all, try to beat up some confessions." Amateurishness in the confessional is supremely out of place. Now at least it will be agreed that, however wrong Confession

fury of the people; nor did we "procede" without a policeman for the preservation of peace. But, by the blessing of God and the protection of the B.V.M. and of my patron St. Hugh and of all the Saints, we were saved from the wrath of the Protestants, and all is quiet. Pray for us, brother.—H.B.

[1] *Confessions*, p. 54.

as a practice may be, the Church of Rome has an accumulated experience, and a tradition of extreme antiquity, a moral theology patiently and minutely elaborated and laboriously instilled into her Levites, which preclude much danger of amateurishness. Even so, it is normally with terror that the young priest enters for the first time his Confessional. Moral theology is even yet not officially taught, I gather, at Mirfield. That Benson conscientiously made a digest of all Lehmkuhl, omitting (as he entertainingly records) the sections on the Sovereign Pontiff as "irrelevant," was exceptional. But he undoubtedly felt the need of training, and grew noted among two or three special friends as a very clever casuist.

This note, as I most diffidently submit, of amateurishness made itself clearly heard in a case when he suggested to a sick penitent that she should receive Unction.

June 22 (1902).

Personally I am so ignorant about it all, that I daresay it is quite wrong even to suggest it. But I cannot help fancying that a Christian would have a right to claim it in illness, quite apart from being *in extremis*. But it is difficult to get, and might be quite wrong.

He consulted Father Frere, and wrote on July 1, 1902:

There are apparently two methods of blessing oil—(1) Western, which must be consecrated by a Bishop, or, under certain circumstances, by seven priests; (2) Eastern, which is not consecrated at all, but is taken from a lamp that burns before a holy image. Secondly, there is the development of its use which ends in *Extreme* Unction—and there is also the original practice, which was a kind of Catholic Faith-healing.

Father Frere agrees that it is perfectly within the rights of a Christian to avail himself of this second use, so long as he is really ready to accept God's will. Father Frere also adds that while he would prefer a Bishop to bless it,

yet that he would not scruple to use oil blessed by a priest, if he could get no other.

However, Father Benson promises to try and get some oil blessed by a Bishop in Scotland, if his penitent will try to get a priest who will consent to use it, and ends by recommending her to put herself "in the correct disposition" of resignation, and also to disregard her people's view that her illness was "nervous." "After all, the doctors know."

I feel convinced that I shall not even be suspected of smiling at those Anglicans who are trying to restore to customary use those Sacraments which they recognise to have lapsed as part of their ecclesiastical life; it is, one may say, Mirfield's programme to Catholicise England through the Sacraments; and Father Benson's spiritual direction, which from 1901 we are able to trace consecutively, was firm and wise, no less than enthusiastic. *Tentativeness* is a quality which, even at the beginning, it would be hard to find in it; and Father Waldegrave Hart has told me that what surprised him not least in so young a man as Benson was his *sureness* of spiritual touch.

II

From his whirlwind activity abroad, Benson used to return with infinite content to the haven of Mirfield. It is a great thing to possess a "haunt of peace," even if you use it chiefly as a repairing-dock in view of further excursions. But he really loved it, and by far the surest proof of this is that, during this period, even in his home he felt himself somewhat a fish out of water. Later on, when the change which, it might have been feared, would create a final severance, had been made, the atmosphere of

Tremans was to him dear beyond most others. But in December, 1902, he could write:

> . . . The life here, which I love, makes one stupid in any other circumstances, and I can't fit in therefore at all with my people. . . . It is rather dreary, but so it is.

His attitude towards his associates at Mirfield was characteristic. He could be enthusiastic, but he was by no means undiscriminating. On certain days when the house was full of clerics, assembled for "quiet days," or the like, he would escape to a friend's room. "Save me!" he would exclaim as he burst in, "too many b-b-lack clergymen about." When, after the confusion which attended the election of Canon Gore to the Bishopric of Worcester in 1902, a new superior was finally appointed to the Mirfield Community, Benson wrote ecstatically of him that he was

> a lean man, a theologian, liturgiologist, hymnologist, scholar, musician, preacher, athlete, and a saint! It is a good list, and he *excels* in each item, and withal a very pleasant human person.

On the other hand, it was after an encounter with one of the brethren who got badly "on his nerves" that he had to wrestle seriously with himself in soul, and wrote thereupon the verses entitled *In the Garden of a Religious House*.

He regretted immensely the disappearance of his Cambridge friends, yet never had he, I imagine, quite so sharp a tongue as at this period:

> "It seems to me quite extraordinary," he wrote to his correspondent in India, in 1902, "the way one has lost sight of people one knew at Cambridge. Really you are almost the only person I know now."
>
> "It's really awful," he wrote again, a good many months

later, "the way I have lost sight of everybody I ever knew. With one consent they have ceased to pay the smallest attention to my existence, and I to theirs."

To a few he alludes by name:

"Yes," he wrote on March 11, 1902, of a man whom he had just called "a really good sort, of a kind":

Yes, undoubtedly X. is the "fat, big, good-natured youth." He always was that. It is a just revenge on Y. that he should have married an Oxford barmaid. He was a quite unspeakably odious boy. I don't think I have ever met such a worthless person. Z. is probably very nice by now. He was very funny as a boy. I remember his once telling me at the age of fourteen that he smoked, "not because he thought it grand, but because really he couldn't get on without it."

He mentions the death of Dolling—"a really great man in his way"—but glides off at once on to the general moral aspect of the situation, applied quickly to himself: "I wish I was him now. Death is a queer thing—terrible and desirable."

A unique sentence appears to me to be the following:

"*I am glad you don't like* A. B. C. [the italics are mine.] He is a tiresome man. I expect a rather upset man too; after this . . . crisis." For the dignitary in question was likely to find himself locked out of a position on which he had speculated. On the whole, what Benson, I think, most of all disliked, was spiritual uncouthness, loudness,[1] and self-satisfied stupidity. (The "stupidity" which were better called "simplicity" he prized beyond pearls, even when it made him slightly irritable; but this irritation he whole-heartedly condemned. He never condemned his hatred for cheap cleverness.)

1 "X. has gone to Scarborough! Can't you fancy him . . . with a cigar? in a rakish hat? winking at young ladies, and calling the barmaid 'Miss.' 'Sweaty 'ot to-day, miss, ayn't it?' With a malacca cane . . ." A cruel little sketch accompanies this skit on one of the more austere of Mirfield's brethren.

He mentions a recently-appointed prelate, and declares that he is an excellent example of conspicuous mediocrity; and therefore acclaimed loudly by the Church of England. "True gentility," says an eighteenth-century maxim, "forms *no* convictions, and is *never* demonstrative."

He is what one must call astute; and it is a poor thing to be. "Be good, sweet Prelate, and let who will be clever." That is really true, I think. Surely astuteness in spiritual things nearly always ends by falling into the pit that it has elaborately "digged for others." However, stupidity in spiritual things is nearly as disastrous. The real secret [he adds dryly] is, of course, to find the golden mean, such as you and I pursue. A really stupid good person rouses me to a kind of frenzy. I met once a really good and stupid Quaker. I love the idea of Quakers, but not their reality . . . at least if this was a specimen. I have hardly ever wanted so much to destroy anybody.

His own occupations pursued themselves quite placidly, and, of course, the drama—children's drama—could not be neglected. In the January of 1900 a Children's Pantomime, *The Beauty and the Beast,* was acted in the Mirfield schoolroom, and he proposed, I gather, to act it again, in 1902, in the Quarry. This, however, never happened.

"The Pantomime was a great success," he wrote on December 29:

I was stage-struck again—as I always am, and began to wish I wasn't a clergyman, in order that I might act myself. And I always fall deeply in love with the leading female characters—which is unfortunate for a monk! However, I have torn myself away. But they look so beautiful, all rouged up and eyebrowed, behind the footlights.[1] They are scarcely of an age to be married yet—about thirteen, is the eldest; and they haven't an "h" in their entire repertoire, and say "oi" for "I," and so on. Still they are exquisite creatures.

[1] He "made up" the children himself, and enjoyed it immensely.

At a dramatic moment, the "Beast" was to be laid out, with a pall and candles, as dead. There was a moment of nerves—the candles had to be removed, lest the villagers might find them "Roman Catholic." Next, one of the more romantic lyrics had its tune altered: the Baptists used it as a hymn. Finally, the expression "Go to blazes" had to be expunged, in deference to pious ears, possibly intolerant of this remote allusion, even, to eternal fires. Hugh never became quite patient with their susceptibilities.

Besides these more secular avocations, he displayed an intermittent and rather perfunctory interest in foreign missions. As early as July, 1901, he had asked an Indian civil servant for information concerning Indian missions, to be incorporated in a book a Mirfield Father was writing. He preached for the S.P.G., and spoke, later on, with sympathy of the Community's new house in Johannesburg. For the "Children of the Church, King's Messengers," a department of the Children's S.P.G. Missionary Association, he even produced, at request, a Syllabus of Instruction, comprising skeleton lectures on the lives of Bishops Field of Newfoundland, M'Dougall of Labuan and Sarawak, Callaway of St. John's, Kaffraria, George Selwyn of New Zealand, and Edward Bickersteth of S. Tokyo, with references to the standard works upon them. But he did not enjoy it. "All my spare time," he writes, "is occupied in translating hymns . . . and also in writing dreary Sunday School lessons on the subject of foreign missions. Poor stuff, I am afraid." He characteristically suggests that the lessons should be driven home by tableaux.

Besides these translations of hymns, he wrote a few poems, published at the time in the *Pilot*, which never

refused his offers.[1] These afterwards formed the bulk of the collected Poems published in 1914 by Messrs. Burns & Oates. He had only consented to their appearance in order that any proceeds of their sale might be devoted to Mr. Norman Potter's Homes, of which I speak below; and indeed their appeal, unless I err, lies chiefly in the personal note—here, pleading upon the whole and pathetic—which he managed to infuse into nearly all his writing. There is in them but little passion, and, perhaps, no very high poetic inspiration; they are at once less academic, but more restricted in their appeal than, say, *The Christian Year;* they have none of the substance of the *Lyra Germanica*, for instance, nor the fresh whimsicality of George Herbert's pious and very personal poems, which Hugh never really loved, nor anything at all of the rapture of a Francis Thompson, whose joys and anguish tore his soul to pieces. Yet all these names have they, by qualities allied or contrasted, recalled to memory. Undoubtedly it is the still wistful, recalcitrant, searching soul of a man known to most as so bright, buoyant, and skiey, which appeals to the reader even where literary perfection is absent. The first poem and the carol are those, perhaps, which move us most.[2]

[1] When the *Pilot* perished, "Why is it that parties succeed," he asked, "and that sincerity doesn't?"

[2] Besides these, he made an effort in Latin versification, on the finding of a stirrup in the foundations of the old Mirfield stables then being turned into the nucleus of the new College. He suggested:

> En! schola equile instat! strepitus sic denique mundi
> Caelorum paci cedit;—et hocce manet!
> Sit monstrum tibi, terrarum ut peregrinus ab orbi
> Ad caelestem urbem vivere, serve Dei.

He gleefully sent these, his first epigram since Eton, to Mr. A. C. Benson, who returned it with some not uncalled-for comments. The epigram is now inscribed

Besides this, he assisted a personal friend and penitent to produce a book of Intercession entitled *Bands of Love*. She began it in 1901, and gave the manuscript to Father Benson in 1902, who, joining the imprimatur of another member of his Community to his own, returned it for publication. It was accepted by an ecclesiastical publisher, together with Father Benson's preface; but owing to the dilatoriness of those responsible for its appearance, it was only just published when Benson became a Catholic. This action of his led to the withdrawal, at the publisher's request, of his preface. After some singular negotiations, the authoress's name too was withdrawn from the title-page of the book, it was Anglicanised, a new preface was written, and it reappeared as the property of those to whom the wearied lady had presented the book.[1] Benson's help had been practical—he was ready to give hints as to type, italics, the advantage of assertions over questions, and the like; but also I confess that he showed a tendency to remodel the substance of what was submitted to him to perfect. Those privileged to have studied under that unique scholar, Professor Robinson Ellis, late Corpus Professor of Latin at Oxford, must remember how his infinite delicacy of touch could transform a man's most mediocre composition into a masterpiece. Perhaps this displays a still greater

beneath the stirrup, which hangs inside the main entrance to the College, and runs as follows:

> En! schola pellit equos: strepitus sic denique mundi
> Caelorum paci cedit: et hoc superest.
> Te moneat mundi strepitu nugisque relictis
> Ad pacem superam tendere, serue Dei.

[1] It was not wasted to her. When, in May, 1904, she went to the Convent of Sion, Bayswater, to be received into the Church, the nuns found that it was she who had written a book lent to them some weeks before, and for the conversion of whose authoress the sisters had been praying ever since. It was *Bands of Love*.

power over the matter in hand than does that forceful recasting which reveals a personality incapable of any self-expression short of self-impression.

Foremost among his literary enterprises is, of course, the collection of stories called *The Light Invisible*. Mr. A. C. Benson had lent his brother the manuscript of certain "mystical" tales, afterwards published as *The Hill of Trouble*, and Hugh had been fascinated.

"The last one," he wrote on May 22 [1901], "'The Closed Window,' terrified me for hours. What I like so much is your device . . . of making the supernatural world open out directly from the natural. I do believe that is the secret of effective supernatural stories."

Thus inspired, he began to write, but expected at first to collaborate with his sister, Miss Margaret Benson.

"My sister and I," he wrote in the autumn of 1902, "are bringing out a book called *Redcap*. Look out for it, and See That You Get It. . . . It is a queer book of odds and ends. My sister has done most of it. Many of the contributions are true. They are short sketches of sudden and startling events—like being nearly killed—Egyptian things, &c. It is called *Redcap* for an abstruse reason which the preface explains."

Rather later, he announces that the book will appear in the spring (of 1903) edited by his sister, and it is to be called *Tales of a Visionary*. This plan, however, fell through, though it will be revived when first he writes the *Mirror of Shalott* stories in 1904. Slightly nervous as to how his book's religious colour might affect the reputation or the feelings of the Mirfield Community, he wrote a complete volume of his own "under an ingenious pseudonym that I do not believe anyone will guess." He signed himself simply *Robert Benson*, reviving the unused

R and dropping *Hugh*. He even on one occasion allowed it to be surmised that Mr. A. C. Benson had written the stories. Miss Margaret Benson pleaded for simplicity as the best concealment, if concealment was to be at all :

> Pseudonymity is a great mistake unless it *must* be preserved ; and this can't be preserved, and I don't see why it should . . . I should say, full name at once—if not, Robert . . . Always speak the truth, especially as you may be found out if you don't.

The stories are put into the mouth of an aged priest whose dogmatic position was to puzzle reader after reader. On two topics connected with this book its author was positively bombarded with inquiries : Were the stories true ? and, Was the priest a Catholic or an Anglican ? He invariably answered that the stories presented themselves as nothing else than fiction. This proved, and proves, a disappointment to a number of people ; but the fact remains that Benson himself never had a direct experience of the sort he here relates, and was, in practice—save in a kind of playful, quite arbitrary manner—very sceptical of the real objective value of what he heard. But that spiritual facts might express themselves somewhat in the manner of these incidents he never for a moment doubted ; gradually he worked up a whole philosophy concerning this ; meanwhile he could make very excellent stories out of the material supplied by imagination or by friends. As for the quality of the old priest's religion, even apart from the fact that the Anglican burial service is somewhere, quite casually, quoted, and that phrases like "the great white throne" belong rather to an Evangelical mysticism into which the Apocalypse is woven, than to modern Catholic phraseology, I do not personally think that a Catholic would find much difficulty in diagnosing the

atmosphere, at least in so far as that it was not what he was accustomed to breathe. Benson himself tells us that he deliberately refrained from asking himself which he meant the old man to be—Anglican or Catholic, and aimed constantly at the water-line. He had at the time a theory about the Church Diffusive, on which I shall touch below, by means of which he was attempting to "obliterate distinctions" within Christ's body, and to substitute for the "contemplation of cold-cut dogma" the "warm realities of spiritual experience." He developed a violent and, as he himself says, "rather exaggerated dislike for the book,"[1] due to a reaction, he considers, against the unrealities in which he was then living.

> I dislike, quite intensely, *The Light Invisible*, from the spiritual point of view. I wrote it in moods of great feverishness, and in what I now recognise as a very subtle state of sentimentality; I was striving to reassure myself of the truths of religion, and assume, therefore, a positive and assertive tone that was largely insincere.[2]

I think he was worried, afterwards, by the thought that almost his most popular book had such a success among Anglicans; and by the recollection that it was an Anglican nunnery which had inspired the chapter called "In the Convent Chapel," a panegyric of that contemplative life which, he came to hold, was essentially what the Anglican Church could make nothing of. Moreover, he had written it when staying in the Clergy House of St. Cuthbert's,[3] Philbeach Gardens, where the Sacrament was

[1] *Confessions*, p. 83.

[2] He ended by professing an entire disbelief that anyone *could* really like the book, and had to be given a list of confessedly "right people" who *did*.

[3] The Abbot of Caldey, however, tells me that the idea of the nun kneeling, so silent, yet so powerful a centre of spiritual energy, first struck Fr. Benson when he, then still Dom Aelred Carlyle, of the Anglican Benedictines, introduced his confrère to the East Malling chapel mentioned below.

reserved; and though at the time he could distract his mind from questions of validity of Anglican orders, yet afterwards he did not like to think that he had pictured a nun's supremest ecstasy as evoked by what he had by then come to believe, objectively, an illusion.

Finally, he once heard the book rather cruelly parodied by an Anglican clergyman.[1] He took criticism with genuine humility, no doubt; but was exquisitely sensitive to what he thought injustice; also, one sometimes grows to hate what one has seen made ridiculous. All this accounts for a certain anti-Anglican vivacity which regularly accompanies the expression of his views on this first book.

Deeper cuts his conviction that part of its theological framework was awry. He considers himself to have confused the essence of *faith* with what he calls "sight"; that is, with vivid intuition, "personal realisation," little else, in fact, than imagination.[2] He does not by this

[1] So I was at first assured. Later, Mr. A. C. Benson has shown me, in a contemporary diary, that he, too, pleasantly parodied *The Light Invisible* on an occasion when each of the three brothers was chaffing the style of the others' stories. Hugh hated this parody at the moment.

[2] A correspondent ran directly counter to Benson's own diagnosis. He writes that he had said to a friend about *The Light Invisible*, "This was his half-way house to Rome. It was the last cry of his soul as it turned itself homeward. . . . His soul was starved . . . it was like a little child robbed of something it ought to have. . . . Don't you see that the whole point of that book is 'spiritual insight'—the *only* real bridge between the Seen and the Unseen? It was not with him a question of authority—anyhow an authority which had its objective presence in this world. He went; his spiritual sight showed him the way. . . . Men go over to Rome for many reasons. We condemn most of them; though they tell us much, they always leave out—through what I may call the soul's modesty—just that exact spiritual force which finally and irresistibly drew them. We must not so blame one . . . who when he went left behind his lantern. Hence, the message of your book was an incomplete one, half-query, half-cry. (Now you must be better off! Tell me!) Won't you tell me what your right hand holds? The left may hold the solution of the Petrine claims, but I don't ask your help to face them or to sharpen my emotional faculties. It is spiritual keys I want."

refer to such exquisite visions as that of Mary, "Consolatrix Afflictorum," mothering the wakeful child under her blue mantle; nor the mere re-focussing of rabbit-cropped, bracken-fringed glade, with its pool and pines, into the "Green Robe" worn by Creation's immanent Lord: still less, the odd allegorical picturing of the nun's prevailing prayer as an elaborate machine, and herself as a financier directing operations from behind a city desk. In short, when Benson talks of "sight" or "imagination," he does not at all mean what is the essential prerogative of all visualisers, who translate every sensation and all their memories into colour and line. Visualiser he remained to the end, and in a high degree. The Catholic stories in the *Mirror of Shalott* are as highly visualised, symbolical, and incarnate, so to say, as ever were the Anglican. But he feels that he has still regarded Faith too much in the Evangelical sense of a strongly *felt* assent rather than as a uniquely *motived* assent. The Catholic doctrine of faith, with all that department of the "supernatural" with which it is essentially allied, more than any other eludes, as a rule, the grasp of non-Catholics. The Catholic does not say, I believe, because my intellect sees its reasonable way to so believing (as, that Democracy is good, or bad); still less, because it is coerced (mathematically, as it were) into so believing (as, that the various propositions of Euclid are true); nor again, I believe because, though my intellect may be silent on the matter, or indeed contradict me herein, I feel superlatively and interiorly convinced that so and so is true: but, I believe it, because an authority, which (reason has convinced me) is divine, asserts it so to be. Reason, that is, has led me to a point where it becomes right for me to assent, though I can still, with varying degrees of culpability, refuse. Catholic

theology teaches that supernatural grace strengthens the human will, making therefore the assent of the will and all future assertions of the guided intellect to be supernatural acts. Such then is, in undefended outline, the Catholic dogma. Benson perceived that *The Light Invisible* offended against this in two ways; or rather, it did so, and he perceived one of them. Namely, for him, intense faith was identified with a mode of spiritual perception latent in all men, but not yet actualised, as all men may be supposed potentially to contain the artistic sense or the moral sense. By developing this spiritual sense or faculty—a development due mainly to prayer and mortification—the soul becomes able to be, at choice, aware of one or other of two interpenetrating planes of reality, the material and the spiritual, rather as a mathematician can at will "abstract" from the concrete qualities of any object and consider the ideal system of forces and curves on which it is organised.

This kind of doctrine is to be found exposed at length in the more reputable books upon Theosophy; and of course every phrase used in the enunciation of it can be paralleled from the most orthodox of theologians, dogmatic no less than mystical. As a whole, however, it confuses the natural and the supernatural, and leads to an exaggerated subjectivity.[1] Corresponding to this overrating of the subjective faculties of the soul, is found a depreciation of those objective methods which reason follows to reach a recognition of the divine. Intellect appears to have nothing to do with faith[2]—no more, at least, than the jewels enter into the constitution or creation of the woman they adorn. Christian apologetics

[1] It is most clearly expressed by the priest in *The Light Invisible*, on pp. 4, 5, 6, and 60.

[2] See p. 167 *ib.*

are "*entirely*" inadequate. Converging lines of probability may lead to God, but do not reach Him. Faith is the product, not of intellectual, but of moral conditions. This recognisably is a doctrine which leads, if pressed, to a position known as "Modernist." A truth may be true religiously which is not true intellectually. Intellectually I know Christ's dust still to lie within His tomb; religiously, I believe Him to be risen. On the material plane, or historically, He was Mary's son and Joseph's; spiritually, I possess Him as Son of God. The habitual misinterpretation of Newman's doctrine of "accumulated probabilities" may have led Benson to speak thus inaccurately; much more probably his doctrine follows straight from his temperament, which was profoundly idealist and intolerant of laboured intellectualism, as we shall shortly see. Meanwhile it is wholly outside my province to defend the Catholic position I have stated; I had only to show where it differs from that expressed in *The Light Invisible*, and what he meant when, later on, he constantly accused his book of confusing faith with sight.

Meanwhile the stories represent a leap full into maturity of style and literary expression astonishing for its suddenness. Sensitive observation, accurate application of language suited to one sense (as hearing) to another (as sight), and the spontaneous interpretation of sound by colour, and sight by music, and the like; very perfect command of metaphor for the description of the subtlest psychic states; all this is as good as ever it will be.[1]

[1] One of his most successful devices—and to be successful it must be most skilfully used—is the picturing, so to say, of the "hush before the storm." So, excellently, on p. 102, and, more lightly, p. 248. In *The Necromancers*, the scene where Mrs. Nugent hears the dog-cart in the night, gives it you perfectly. Dickens was fond of this device; he used it masterfully, *e.g.*, before the death of Carker, in *Dombey and Son*, or of Montague Tigg, in *Martin Chuzzlewit*.

Tremans supplied much of the rather luscious *mise-en-scène*, especially the garden, the gateway, and the oratory, with its adjacent rooms. The extreme perfection of the old priest's equipment, the apparatus of his life, is dwelt on not too preciously, perhaps, by one who was destined to create so artistic a shrine for his last years, within which his soul was able, none the less, to live in such detachment. Still, Benson himself recognised that here he lapsed, as he was often to do, into the romantic. But with this refined and cultured sentiment goes too a genuine human passion. It would be hard to surpass *Consolatrix Afflictorum*, already quoted; and the page which tells of the murmuring echo of a whole world's Aves, gathered to Mary's heart under the dark blue mantle, reaches a high level of feeling. Moreover, Benson reveals himself endowed with the rare quality of being able to tell an excellent tale. *The Traveller* is a straightforward sound ghost-story.[1] *Under which King* is vivid, and tantalisingly refuses us the key to the one of its many riddles we really wanted to unlock (and this is most Bensonian); in many of the chapters we find the authentic touch of the uncanny. The ghastly face suspended in the tree, drawing succulent delight from the murdered thrush; the red dog's-eyes of the damned man in *Poena Damni;* the misshapen idiot boy who prayed there, on Christmas night, in the quarry, till on the mud was shown the tiny mark of a Child's foot. . . . Writing of this last tale, almost shocking in its abrupt invasion of the mystical by the material, Mr. E. F. Benson mentioned the

[1] It was in the Gate House at Malling Abbey that one of St. Thomas's murderers is said to have taken refuge. It, like the Abbey, is haunted; Father Richards, chaplain of the convent and Benson's friend (*Confessions*, p. 55), was evicted by the ghost, and doubtless Benson was thinking of this when he wrote his tale.

"tremendous grip"; of the book as a whole, he alludes to "distinction and charm" as its characteristics. And that perhaps is true; Benson charms you—that is, unless you are one of those whom all the time he angers—and all of a sudden grips you. And if you quarrel with his incidents, well, as in the same letter Mr. E. F. Benson puts it, "To say 'I am sorry, but it happened that way,' [is] the inalienable right of the author."

But throughout the book emerge the main ideas which are to be Benson's themes throughout his life: the sacramentality of all nature, taught immediately in *The Green Robe:* the appalling reality of sin (*Poena Damni*), and of diabolic agency (*The Watcher*), which have caused the spiritual and material and intellectual planes, which normally should interpenetrate and harmoniously co-exist, to be, as it were, tilted and awry (*Over the Gateway*), bringing it to pass that Pain is the inevitable punishment divinely alchemised into the supremest remedy (*With Dyed Garments, The Bridge over the Stream*), a remedy which pure souls, owing to their incorporation with Christ achieved by love (*Unto Babes*) and prayer (*In the Convent Chapel*), are privileged to apply to the race at large, at, so to say, their own expense (*The Sorrows of the World*). "In the morning" comes 'The Expected Guest,' and Benson finishes (as in *The King's Achievement*) with a sentence deliberately and even audaciously ambiguous. "The Rector had come."[1]

[1] He will defend this quaint device—from a literary standpoint not unlike Horace's quiet endings to his more high-pitched odes—as being at once psychologically and religiously accurate. You constantly are not sure what an event means, or what your own words mean; it is, however, in keeping with the general scheme of things that they should, to some extent, be sacramental.

When these notions are made explicit, that is deliberate and on the whole distasteful to him. He far preferred to leave you with vague and tremendous impressions of unseen, transcendent forces interacting, such as Maeterlinck will

The Blood Eagle is a story which stands rather alone. In it Benson makes one of his rare excursions into a philosophy of paganism. It is paralleled by "Father Bianchi's story" about Mithra in the *Mirror of Shalott*. The old priest, when a boy, had assisted at a singular spectacle in a wood, which was identified, when he described it to a Professor, as a "blood-eagle" or sacrifice to some pagan deity, of whom the boy (though the Professor disregarded this, being but a "Higher Critic") had a vision. He was standing on a tumulus where these sacrifices, originally human, had in ancient times been offered. But the earth was still black and sodden with the blood of the pig which he had seen escape, wounded, and pursued by an old man dripping too with its blood, and for which (does Father Benson give us to understand?) he was in genuine danger of himself being substituted. The story is decidedly "unpleasant," and in spirit, as well as in setting, reminds us, though still palely, of Mr. A. Machen's *House of Souls*.

"Practically everybody," he wrote on June 7, 1903, "has either failed to understand it, or has disliked it. And yet I think that what I meant is both harmless and true: viz. that a brutal and filthy superstition, so long as there is a deference paid to the unseen world, is better than the most polished materialism. The old man and the Professor are the pivots."

In 1900, an event occurred which might well have altered Hugh's whole career. One of the canons of

hint at. Maeterlinck, indeed, still broods over the book; the silhouette of Tremans on the cover is quite obscure enough to satisfy him.

Already we catch ourselves smiling at the recurrent Bensonian turns of thought and phrasing. "I searched furiously." "He beckoned to me furiously." How often in Hugh Benson's letters that repeats itself—"Here am I writing furiously—working furiously"! And sentences begin, as in Kipling's earlier work, so often with "Yes" or "No," implying interruptions hard enough (when you try) to put into words.

St. George's, Windsor, suggested to Mr. A. C. Benson that Hugh might be willing to accept the living of Hungerford in Berkshire, which was vacant. It was a position of importance, being well endowed, its staff of rector and, I think, three curates shepherding at that time a population of three thousand. It was a singularly high office to be offered to so young a man, and was to be judged even more by what it promised than by what it was in itself.

On June 7, 1900, he wrote from 4 Little Cloisters, Westminster, refusing the offer.

I feel it is such a terribly responsible position—and I am so inexperienced. . . . But the offer has had sufficient effect on me to make me reconsider the Community question altogether—and I have practically decided to postpone my profession, and to ask for another year's probation. Although I sincerely feel that I am not meant to take this particular post, it may be an indication that I am ultimately meant to do work of this kind. In any case the time is not lost, as I am getting experience of a concentrated kind that ought to be very valuable.

By June 9 he is able to write that he has definitely renounced standing for his election in July, and on June 12 he says:

Certainly an outward invitation to take up any new work has a great influence on one when it comes unexpectedly—but only when it meets a growing conviction in oneself that that kind of work is right for one. [Such was the invitation to go to Mirfield, such is not, that to go to Hungerford.]

You suggest that I am wilful in this, and am "choosing rather than following," but I cannot say more than that I am doing my best to be sincere. Besides, does not "following" convey a sense of continuing to do what you are already doing, and "choose," a sense of starting fresh in a way? It seems also to be a recognised canon of learning "vocation," that after a course of life has been taken up, it should not be forsaken for any less strong

reason than that which drew one to it, and I must say that at present the balance is down on the community side—though to speak honestly—only just.

Next day he continues:

. . . It seems to me there are two methods—one, the parochial, is to live close to people and, starting from that, to work "ad hominem"; the other, the community life, to live to a certain extent apart and work "de Deo" (which sounds presumptuous, but which I do not think really is); of course one does not mean that either is exclusive of the other, but only that each has a different tendency. . . . There is also in mission work a peculiar intensity of spiritual touch, that while it has its dangers, also has its extreme advantages. [He then draws his only conclusion:] Community life is a vocation for *some*—is it for me?

During the next months his reflections on community, as compared with parochial, life issued in the following letter to the Rev. J. H. Molesworth, on November 7, 1900. He was at Tremans, recruiting from the influenza, which he said he got once a week and twice on Sundays.

My dear Molesworth,—At last I answer your letter. I have been down here convalescing for a few weeks from various disorders, and when one has got nothing to do, you know the way in which one does nothing. You speak about the Religious Life—and ask me what I think. I am quite certain that its revival in the Church of England is from God—and that men's communities as well as women's have a great work to do. If I may say so, I think my testimony is worth more, as I am not yet certain of my own vocation. I did not offer myself for election last July, and am not at all sure yet what my decision will be next year. But I am quite sure that there *is* such a vocation—and that it is a very lofty one. There is work to be done of a kind that no one else can do. Our parochial system is not doing the magnificent work it is capable of, just because at present there is not sufficient work done in conjunction with it that can only be done by communities. If one may dare to say so, our Lord's "method" and St. John's complement one another. As our Lord's is the

vital work and the Baptist's only incidental to it, so the parochial system is undoubtedly the vital one—but it is helped beyond measure by what Communities are really only able to do. One sees continually in the work of one's brethren at Mirfield parishes startled into new life.

As for the internal life of the Community, it is exactly the kind necessary not only to make men efficient workers, but pious persons. I can say all this with much more freedom since I am not yet at all clear as to whether I am called to the life.

My letter looks very cool and didactic, but you wished me to say what I thought. It seems to me that the only weak point is that conceivably men, myself among them, might be attracted by the great privileges of the life, to a state to which God may not have called them. Do write again soon. H. B.

The year then passed in work such as we have described, and Benson found, as July of 1901 approached, that it was "better than retreat." "I am sure," he had written on April 28 of that year, "that the way in which vocations are usually found is by doing the next thing as it comes to hand—and being content to go on doing it without impatience."

I insert here part of two letters which accurately show his attitude of mind towards life at Mirfield:

I agree *entirely* about Mirfield being a narrowing life . . . but that is precisely why I am here. To do anything well, one must deliberately sacrifice a large number of other excellent pursuits and tastes. That is, surely, what you have to do yourself. You sacrifice all that living in England means, rightfully and deliberately, for a particular purpose. Broadness is the very death of efficiency—except to one or two geniuses who have so much energy that they seem, at any rate, to be able to devote themselves to several things at once. There are simply scores of people one could quote, who weighed the cost, and then neglected one part of their nature, or rather pruned it off, in order to have more time and leisure and energy for that particular thing they meant to do well.

The Scriptures favour me too, I fancy (1 Cor. ii. 2, Phil. iii. 7).

(This is a pretty pass, when I fire texts at you across the sea!)

Indeed all this is my solemn opinion. Celibacy, and many other things, are right just for that very reason, and not because marriage is "low" or "carnal" or any nonsense of that kind. . . .

It seems to me that the reason why we have such an alarming number of mediocrities, and lack of giants, is because of this *accursed* gospel of broadness, and "keeping in touch with current thought." We are given a smattering of many subjects, and command of none, and zeal is always derided as "narrow."

And again:

Lent has been too terrific for anything. Roughly, I estimate I have preached about seventy sermons, and I never wish, at present, to utter another word on the subject of Religion. . . . In about a fortnight I kick off again: but not for long, thank goodness—because then I have my holiday, and then a month of peace and quietness here, during which time I hope to take the final step of committing myself to this life at Mirfield. It is rather terrifying to contemplate, and I am not absolutely determined yet; but if nothing startling happens, by the end of July I shall become a fixture.

. . . The loneliness must be vile [he was writing to India]. I do indeed sympathise—because I am exactly the same. To be quite alone even for a day is abominable to me. But I always think there is a certain grim satisfaction in shoving a thing alone, in a humdrum way. We have a dog at home who runs with the carriage: when he has sported himself about *enough*, he goes under the carriage into the dust, and pads along with his hind-legs and tail showing over the back; and I always sympathise. He wishes, I think, to be part of a going machine, and puts himself into touch with a larger thing than himself, and he finds it worth the dust, because the wheels are going all round him. I always feel just the same here—after barking in various places one comes back and fits into this machine; and the very monotony is a joy. When I feel down I always draw satisfaction

from the dog, because there is an extraordinary pleasure in absolutely wearisome routine, and it has a kind of hypnotic fascination that a turning wheel has.

Excuse this outburst of allegory.

Hence he schooled himself to write, on July 12, 1901, to Mr. A. C. Benson:

I think Mamma told you a little time ago that I was getting more settled here, and now I think I have quite made up my mind to join the Community at the end of this month. [Probably, he adds, he would have joined last year but for his brother's words.] I feel now that there is nothing else to be done. I am both more efficient and more happy than ever in parish work, and am less incompetent at this particular kind of work than any other.

However, a bomb exploded brusquely. He wrote again on July 23 to Mr. A. C. Benson:

July 23. . . . I am sorry to say that everything is in the wildest confusion, and for the present my profession is postponed. I shall have to decide by Monday morning whether I will offer myself for election or not. It arose out of a lecture given to us by Canon Gore on "Higher Criticism" that upset me terribly. I had not heard that kind of thing before, and the Community cannot see its way to giving me leave to be absent.

All this alludes to an episode which, as far as I can see, he afterwards entirely forgot. At any rate, nowhere, that I can find, has he mentioned it. Yet quite clearly it was a pivotal point in his life—if not, indeed, an event directive of all his mental development.

This episode occurred on the occasion of one of those "Quiet Times" at which all available members of the Community met together at Mirfield. They involved, with other elements, a lecture, or perhaps two, upon some

point considered of importance to the understanding of the religious situation of the day.[1]

During that of July, 1901, Canon Gore gave two or three lectures, which afterwards appeared in the *Pilot*, upon the Synoptic Problem. He undoubtedly considered himself, while being fair to the opponents of the Gospel record, as traditionally accepted, to be asserting a theologically safe yet scientifically sure position. But, as we have seen, Benson was thrown into a passion of dismay, begged leave to attend no more such lectures in the future, and withdrew, for four days (July 23–27) to consider his position. About the facts there can be no doubt, though they have left so slight an impression even upon contemporary correspondence.

The Bishop of Oxford has kindly written to me as follows:

CUDDESDON, WHEATLEY, OXON.,
25th *January* 1915.

DEAR FR. MARTINDALE,—[. . .] With regard to Benson, I was very much attracted by him when he came to Mirfield, but became speedily conscious that his mind and mine moved in different planes. The most characteristic thing which I remember was an occasion when I found, to my great surprise, that he had never read the most usual commentaries on books of the New Testament, especially those by his father's friend, Dr. Lightfoot. I urged him to read them on account of their surpassing merit, but he came back after a time and told me that he would do it if I told him, but that he wished seriously to assure me that, if he were to consider such arguments

[1] It was of one of these he wrote: "We are all at home just now—having a 'Quiet Time.' It is nice and restful, only we jaw too much in the evenings. . . . Some of us are not made for debate—too moody. Possibly I am myself." As a matter of fact, I am told that Hugh used to behave extraordinarily well, considering. He was often to be seen positively red in the face with the effort not to say the thousand things he was bursting to say. The politically liberal, not to say downright socialistic, colour which has at all times been observable at Mirfield worried him not a little. He believed himself to observe this, as well as theological liberalism, in the first superior, Canon Gore.

about the authenticity of books of the Bible—arguments of the critical reason—and were to give his mind seriously to them, he feared he would become a sceptic. This sort of critical reasoning appeared to him to result wholly in scepticism. With him it was "all or nothing." If he were to hold on to religion, he must accept it simply on authority because of his moral needs.

This he said quite seriously and solemnly. I do not know what he may have thought later on in his life, but I am certain that at the period when he came to Mirfield, and all through the time he was there, this represented his state of mind; and I do not think anyone could give a true account of what he was at that time and in his later years amongst us without making this apparent. Thus I hope you will publish this letter. The scene I have described has remained in my mind extraordinarily distinctly ever since the time of our conversation, and I have often pondered over it. I am sure that I have not exaggerated.—Yours faithfully, C. OXON.

Benson himself wrote, though not upon this occasion, to India:

"As regards the Epistle to Romans, I am particularly ignorant of commentaries." He discovers, however, by inquiry, Sanday and Headlam!

I can't get along with commentaries at all. It is a forgotten element in my theological composition. What I love is dogmatic and scientific theology, and "ascetic." I have been reading a lot of this latter lately, "Mother Julian of Norwich," "Molinos," &c. Mother Julian was a delightful lady of 1400, who was an anchoress at Norwich, and was "no scholar," but who had the most beautiful and comforting visions. "Al shal bee well—al shal bee well; and thow shal see for thyself that al maner of thynge shal bee well." And so on. Very deep too.[1]

[1] By January, 1902, he has read this famous mystic, whom he loves despite the perplexities of her last chapters, "two or three times." I should like to emphasize already that theological and intellectual differences generally never seemed to injure his personal relations or his sense of equity. Just as one of his closest friends at Mirfield was socialist in tendency, so he is delighted when he finds his friends like Canon Gore's books; earnestly recommends his *Prayer*

The storm subsided, superficially, as rapidly as it rose. Benson returned to Mirfield unable on his side to see anything preventing his profession. At least the emotion that drove from Liberalism had stilled the emotion that drew to Rome. "Are you," Canon Gore inquired of him, "in any danger of lapse?" "No," said the candidate, astonished at the question. He was elected on July 29th, and professed on the 1st of August, 1901. He writes in his *Confessions*, with sincere emotion, of the happiness of that day. *Ecce nova facio omnia.* He obtained a new cassock. His mother assisted at the initiation of a new life. From the brethren he took the Pax, the kiss of peace; at the altar he received Communion. "In the afternoon I drove out with my mother in a kind of ecstasy of contentment."

He flung himself into work once more. "It is hard," he writes, "for Catholics to believe it, but it is a fact that as an Anglican I had far longer hours in the Confessional than I have ever had in the Catholic Church. . . . In one London parish, for instance, for about four days at the end of a mission, my brother-missioner and I interviewed people, hearing confessions and recommending resolutions and rules of life, for over eleven hours each day; two more hours were occupied in delivering sermons to vast congregations. . . . We came from our quiet life red-hot with zeal, and found everywhere men and women who seemed to have been waiting for us in an extraordinary manner."

Besides these exterior activities, the Mirfield Theological College was at this time preoccupying Hugh's mind a little, and he wrote to the Archbishop of Canterbury about it.

and the Lord's Prayer, and *The Creed of the Christian;* but of his *Body of Christ* I confess that he says he finds it "a terrible book, and really misleading in language—a totally wrong impression of what he really believes. All his friends say so."

The Archbishop, in his reply, dated August 28, 1902, said:

NEWTON DON, KELSO, N.B.
28th August 1902.

. . . I am keenly interested in what you tell me of the new departure—for it is new, I suppose?—in the work of your Community.

And every thoughtful and capable plan for the wise preparation and guidance of ordinands ought at present, I think, to be welcomed by the whole Church. Whether the actual doctrinal and practical teaching which *you* would give to such ordinands corresponds quite with what I should myself give, is really a minor, though a most important, matter. There is huge peril, as I think, in men taking to the technical study of theology with a view to ordination, without its being based upon adequate education of a general sort, and I therefore rejoice to see that you contemplate preparing all your men for a degree in Arts before they become theologians.

In this letter the Archbishop not only added his voice to that great chorus of experts in all branches who declare that he succeeds best in his specialised department who has not been defrauded of that wide base of general education which the traditional forms of public school and university teaching take as their ideal; but he was with infinite delicacy reminding Father Benson himself that his theological studies, such as they were, reposed on no very wide or solid foundations. Of his University training enough has already been said. He did not love the classics; of science he will write:

. . . What a relief it is to come across anyone who doesn't know about "science." Personally, I fear I am a hopeless person to ask about it; it always seems to me a "red herring" in Christian apologetics; and that unless one really knows about it, like Fr. ——, one had much better keep to generalities, such as that science and religion have no more to do with one another than, *e.g.*, geography and music! They are both branches of truth,

and therefore both come from God; but beyond that, &c. . . . But I am hopelessly prejudiced! And you had much better ask Fr. —— what he thinks.[1]

Of general history he never was, I think, a close student, though it must be confessed he learnt his way about the documents relating to such periods as he did study with great success. In speaking of his historical novels, I shall find it easy to emphasize the minute care in research and quite scholarly effort after accuracy he displayed. And with regard to general topics of modern interest, we have his brother's testimony that he was something of a Gallio.

"I do not think," he writes, "that Hugh had ever any real interest in social reform, in politics, in causes, in the institutions which aim at the consolidation of human endeavour and sympathy."[2]

Perhaps this statement will need some slight, not qualification, but adjustment, to the perspective of Hugh's ideals and motives before it will convey a perfectly true impression. Still, as a fact, it is undoubtedly true. Later, it will be easy to follow the main lines of Hugh's philanthropic and social interests; at present, references to contemporary topics of political and social importance are startling by their absence. None but a few references to the Education crisis of 1902 diversify his very full correspondence with his friend in India. I quote one which is perhaps characteristic:

November 15.

There is a frightful storm raging about the Education Bill. I have almost given up trying to understand it.

[1] *Spiritual Letters*, p. 14. His explicit declaration on this subject we shall find in his novel, *None other Gods*, where he incarnated the spirit of science, in the usual sense of that word, in Dr. Whitty, a personage for whom he had an esteem bordering on veneration.

[2] *Hugh*, p. 123.

The only principle I am quite confident of is that every system of education (religious) which is not *strictly* denominational is rotten. I would far sooner Jewish children were taught Jewish religion than a washed-out Christianity.

Christianity has simply not been given a chance in our schools. You might as well have a board to discuss the ingredients of medicine, and strike out all "poisons" (*e.g.* strychnine, &c.), as have a board of vague managers to discuss religious teaching. There is something connected with the original, I will admit, left in both cases, but it is neither medicine nor Christianity.

It will, then, be idle to seek for any of Benson's preoccupations at this time outside the theological interests which were always his. It might perhaps have been expected that an illation could be made from the class of studies imposed by the Mirfield Fathers upon the students of their Theological College to those which they demanded of themselves. But to begin with, the College syllabus, though now of a very comprehensive and efficient sort,[1] was, in Hugh Benson's time, still fairly fluid. Moreover, the family spirit reigning in the Community brought it to pass that, although in almost every department the house might include a man of real distinction and originality, yet such very wide liberty was deliberately accorded to each as regards occupation and details of study, that it would be impossible to estimate, from the mere fact of his having been there, what a man might have achieved. Besides, men arrived at Mirfield at very different stages of their mental formation ; some in middle age, when the mind does not take kindly to novelties of thought, least of all of abstract thought, and when the

[1] After the taking of their degree at Leeds University, where they reside in a Hostel, the students spend two more years in theological study at Mirfield. After Ordination and some experience of pastoral work, they are invited to return for a visit of a week or more, during which they study moral theology and casuistry.

memory refuses, in most cases, to charge itself with any new burden of facts.

Anyhow, what differentiates Mirfield most completely from a Catholic seminary naturally is, that theology can there be taught historically or at most philosophically, or in both these ways, but not dogmatically. There might be theses, but to these no "note" could be attached; the professors could not propound, as Catholic professors must, "This thesis is *of faith*, or *probable*, or *theologically certain*." Interesting, pious, and encouraging the theological explanations Benson heard might be, but scarcely satisfying to his soul, which craved authority. In consequence, apart from his moral notes, the synopsis of Lehmkuhl, referred to above, among his many note-books of that period I find one only which can be called theological, and it contains, by the quaintest chance, a very bored digest of Pusey's commentary on the *Minor Prophets* and the Abbé Turmel's historical account of the dogma of original sin. Thus did the high orthodox Anglican elbow the French Modernist; and on neither does Father Benson feel himself drawn to express any sentiment as to worth of method or conclusion. One book, however, of an exceptional kind exists. It is a minute and purely mystical interpretation of Genesis and Exodus taken almost verse by verse.[1] This was written in 1901.

[1] I quote a few lines from the meditations suggested by Exodus xiv.

1–4. The final blow against sin, by placing souls beyond its tyranny.

7. 600 chariots: the mark of "assault" (666 number of Beast).

14. Thus the Apostles were terrified until the power had finally come, and they were separated from sin by Pentecost.

16. The Blessing of the Water.

19. The Cloud is the Spirit; both together save Israel.
Water and the Spirit constitute Baptism.

20. Yet the world fails to understand: The Spirit is dark on the world's side.

A perpetual allegory.

There is a little more in another book about the Apocalypse, but very little else.

Such then is the account, as complete in all save one department as I can make it, of Benson's life at Mirfield. In that department is, of course, to be found all that relates directly to his Romeward movement. At Mirfield he was religiously happy: his apostolic work was active to the point of feverishness; his literary power was developing enormously; all his future characteristics were plainly visible. His life might have seemed to him ideal, had it not been for the discordant voice reiterating in his ears a call of which he could not judge the nature. Hence, a certain hardness, irascibility, *noisiness* (if I dare so describe it), still discernible in him, is to be put down not alone to the relative superficiality of youth's emotions and inexperienced outlook, but to the uneasiness of one who is not wholly in his proper *milieu*, and half knows it, and wholly tries to persuade himself that this is untrue. Artificiality enters such a life; the man is not altogether "himself." It will be our duty to study, now, his difficult transit from one atmosphere, or rather world, into another; the machinery of his life will groan and jar more harshly still, before all his soul runs smooth.

CHAPTER VIII

CONVERSION

All this part of my way was full of what they call Duty, and I was sustained only by my knowledge that the vast mountains (which had disappeared) would be part of my life very soon if I still went on steadily towards Rome.

H. BELLOC, *The Path to Rome.*

I

WHEN, during his life at Mirfield, did the call to Rome make itself heard once more?

The first that I can find is early in 1902, when Father Frere wrote to him from Florence a letter which I summarise:

I am very sorry to hear of all your trouble of mind about our differences. . . . The issue is now narrowed. . . . The papal infallibility is now the real point at issue and with (the Pope's) action comes the denial by the Roman Catholics of our position. The historical argument is "extraordinarily difficult" if by it alone we hope to arrive at a conclusion. But the plain man can decide about the immediate fact on the evidence of his own experience which is "God's book for each man." Ask, "Am I no priest? Are my communions frauds?" "So many of our sort get an idealised Rome into our heads or a sort of fantastic view—I am afraid I shall have to go—or in some way or another get beset with an insane sort of judgment on the point (on) which we suspect or know ourselves not to be sane and which therefore we know we cannot trust, and so hover and hover and swing this way and that . . . a horrid agony of nightmare."

For a brief space this letter laid the ghost. The appeal to the evident experience of the plain man was,

to Benson's temperament, irresistible. For a long time—to the very eve, in fact, of his reconciliation—he will believe himself a priest; and the inference that where the sacraments are, and where grace is given with them, there is the Church, seems at first sight irresistible.

In the June, then, of 1902 he told his mother, as they paused upon a little bridge over a brook near Tremans, that he had been disturbed in his mind by the vision of Rome, but that his mind was once more at rest. Newman, however, after the terrible challenge of Augustine's claim against the Donatists,[1] solemnly cried aloud that he who has once seen a ghost can never be as though he had never seen it; and so for Hugh Benson too the vision once more dawned on his horizon after being only a month or two eclipsed. He had promised that nothing should be thought or done by him without his telling his mother, and "sometime between that and Christmas I had to redeem my promise." By the fulfilment of this promise, and the careful acquainting of Mrs. Benson and of Father Frere of each step in his progress, he rendered himself invulnerable, on his conversion, to one whole flight of darts, shot by those for whom deceit and Catholicism are associated notions, and who cannot imagine a conversion honestly carried through. Loyally did the recipients of his confidences disabuse his accusers in this matter.

I must therefore try to summarise as clearly as possible the theory, or rather the two theories, by which during his Mirfield period he justified his position as a minister in the Church of England. And here, as always, when dealing with what is the combined product of direct experience, of introspection, of reminiscence, and

[1] *Securus iudicat orbis terrarum.*

of the schematising intellect, I will not forget that at any given moment of this period Benson might not have recognised as his what is here assigned to him. It can be checked in two ways—first, by his *Confessions*, on which, of course, I draw largely, and second, by his letters of this period. And yet everybody knows how, during a space of years, the intellect has been subconsciously at work upon its material, eliminating, rearranging, focusing. Who would have supposed that the tempest-tossed Augustine—as we see him portrayed long after, when he relates his conversion in his own *Confessions*—was the man who in reality had been writing philosophic treatises, and commenting on Vergil for hours together, and entertaining his mother and a group of cultured friends, in the villa at Cassiciacum? that the passionate convert, as alone most readers know him, was too the tranquil theorist, who decided to embrace Christianity, determined all the while that he would have to find nothing wrong with Neoplatonism? You must infuse a considerable element of calculation, it may be, into Augustine's *Confessions*, to obtain a truthful picture; and of passion, not to say whim, into Father Benson's *Confessions*, to obtain a portrait of the Mirfield Hugh. So too, although we can watch him in the letters spoken of above, which have already shown him as a man of moods, these may, on their side, do so too exclusively, for letters are things of the moment, and need, they too, correction. But there are some contemporary and deliberately drawn up documents which shall guide us.

For a considerable time then, he considers, he had held to the position that the Anglican Church was an accurate, or fairly accurate, *restoration* of the teaching in vogue at a "Primitive" period, considered, on the whole, to

have existed down to the end of the fifth or sixth century, or perhaps up to the Fourth General Council inclusive. Then corruption had set in: Rome and Constantinople had piled up their excesses; the Nonconformists, by defect, had dropped out altogether. The theory is a familiar one, and very simple at first sight. It demanded, however, that one should admit the "failure of Christ's promises" for a thousand years; it assumed, too, that the reconstruction of primitive doctrine was an affair of historical research, to be demanded, presumably, from experts. Archæology had at no time much fascination for Hugh. He demanded a living voice in a modern world. Clear that the Prayer Book was no more of a living voice than the Bible, he turned to "the only elements in the Church of England which bear any resemblance at all to a living voice—the decisions of Convocation, the resolutions of Pan-Anglican Conferences, and the utterances of Bishops"—with the result that he found them contradictory, or dumb, or, as he naïvely owns, they answered "in a manner which I could not reconcile with what I was convinced was the Christian Faith." He never, that is, expected to find in them a voice endowed with even that minimum of authority which should govern at least his exterior consent and public teaching. Modify it indeed he did, but according to what the clergy of the churches he visited might expect. The shape, colour, and adornment of their stoles proved, he says, a fairly accurate barometer of doctrine; it was more confusing when vestments were worn indeed, but only at services to which "important Protestants did not come." To veil your language, to utter discourses fully intelligible to a select few, might amuse a naughty boy, still at the age of plots and codes and ciphers, but was

intolerable to a grown man of passionate sincerity. But merely to preach a few great truths, such as the Fatherhood of God, or the all-importance of the Person of Christ, trusting that these would "find their normal outcome in doctrines which Christ, the Father's Utterance, meant to be taught, but His official representatives dared not teach," was torture to one whose whole Christian position, collegiate and personal, implied that Christ spoke through a Church, and the Church through her priest.

By instinct Benson hated Gnosticism, and the cult of the élite, and the *disciplina arcani*. There was a sphere in which he gave rein to his schoolboy love for plot and counterplot, but it was that of personal or domestic politics, not of essential religion. And he could not but feel nervous when he found that on almost every point which he considered thus essential, he had to act unsupported by, if not in defiance of, the officials of his Church.

At this point, therefore, he found himself obliged to alter his basal theory. He no longer proclaimed the Church of England the purest of the three great Churches on which alone his view was focused; and he abandoned any attempt to find a definite voice, or organ for a voice, in that Church. He regarded the Church, now, as equally composed of Roman, Eastern, and Anglican, and their "silent consent" was their authoritative voice. Where they did not deny, they taught. The whole difficulty now appeared to be to keep Canterbury quiet enough; if she spoke, she might speak heresy. Moscow nobody listened to; Rome spoke, presumably the truth; England as a whole muttered a good deal, but inaudibly for the most part, and anyhow so obscurely that you might say she did not explicitly disavow her sisters. The Thirty-nine

Articles were "explained away in the manner familiar to Anglican controversialists."[1] Father Benson therefore declares himself to have believed in the Church Diffusive; from such communities as had retained the Apostolic ministry and the Creeds, a kind of general consent exhaled itself, though how this inarticulate conviction was to be stated in dogmatic forms remained a puzzle; doctors would most certainly disagree; to whom should the unlettered layman, not skilled in diagnosing the constituent elements of belief, while held as it were in solution and unprecipitated, appeal? "Well, . . ." argued Father Benson, "to a clergyman who acknowledges, with me, the Church Diffusive in my sense." Having thus packed one's jury, and being oneself the judge, there should be no great difficulty about a satisfactory verdict.

But, as I said, no honest man could, in this frame of mind, feel *secure*. It was at this time that his second attack of anxious surmise supervened.

He therefore made one new clear statement of the Diffusive Theory, and sent it to the Rev. G. Tyrrell, S.J., under cover of the following letter. I quote the letter in full: the statement will be seen in the Appendix, Vol. II., p. 451.

Private and Confidential.

HOUSE OF THE RESURRECTION,
MIRFIELD.

REV. AND DEAR SIR,—You will pardon a complete stranger troubling you? I have had the pleasure of reading most of your books, and feel that, if you will allow me, I can more easily consult you about the position I am in, than anyone in the Roman Catholic Communion.

For about five years I have had, from time to time, strong drawings towards "Rome." In attempting to test the nature of these drawings, I have practically always found

[1] *Confessions*, p. 74.

that my motives were so mixed and second-rate, that I could not in any way clearly distinguish the motions of the Holy Ghost; and it appeared to me my duty to regard them as assaults upon faith. Again and again I came to the conclusion, after thought and prayer, that God had placed me in an extremely difficult position in the field of His Church, and that it would be a terrible breach of trust to leave it.

Since Lent, however, these drawings have appeared more strongly than ever. Very frequently, however, I still detect among them second-rate motives of personal tendencies and "policy," as well as definitely evil motives of a love of ease, and subtle forms of pride, poisoning all the springs of thought. Again and again some humiliation has turned my thoughts to the Roman Communion as a way of escape. But I feel that, in spite of these evil and inadequate motives, something more is behind; and I cannot tell whether the voice is the voice of God or not.

There are, too, to my mind, several very real and weighty obstacles in the way of my submission to "Rome" (if, indeed, they are not Divine warnings); and it is about those obstacles that I chiefly wish to make inquiries.

In the meantime, I am learning, I think, more than ever that faith is a gift, and not a climax of intellectual processes; and it is this gift that I lack. If Rome alone is the Catholic Church, I lack it; or if the Church of England is part of the Catholic Church, I tend to lack it. At present the phrase "I believe in the Catholic Church" means little more to me than that I believe there is such a thing.

But whether these drawings are of faith or temptation, I am unable to follow them until I am in good faith as regards intellectual difficulties. Of course I am quite willing to leave many obscure things unsolved; but it cannot be right to act clean contrary to what does not seem obscure at all, but perfectly clear. Some of the questions on the paper that I enclose seem to me perfectly clearly against "Rome." And it is only this deepening touch on my soul (whether of God or the Evil One I am not sufficiently spiritual to distinguish), which makes me even discuss these questions with myself, and ask whether I am right or wrong in my intellectual conceptions.

The enclosed papers contain the chief of my difficulties, and I should be most deeply grateful if the papers might be returned to me annotated with comments, or with

references to books that I should read. I am willing too, of course (and should be grateful), to see yourself or anyone that you recommend, if that is right, and to observe any course of devotion or reading that is advisable so far as these things are within my power. But I am naturally tied to a certain extent by the conditions of my life here.

But I am above all anxious to avoid anything approaching a controversial tone. If a certain tone (which for want of another term one must call controversial) is at all prominent in the books one is recommended to read, one's heart so quickly turns to self-defence, and becomes hard and closed to truth. In more than one "Roman" book I have read lately I have been rendered incapable of appreciating fully the force of arguments, because it seemed as if the writers desired to bully me; and as they were unable to judge dispassionately, they have attributed false motives, and misrepresented facts in connection with the Church of England. And it is partly for this reason that I am presuming to write to you, since I feel sure that you know that sincerity is not wanting to our clergy, and that the "Catholic Movement" in the Church of England is not mainly supported by blasphemous fools who like playing at being priests, and that at least some of our leaders possess common honesty and sense.

My questions I have tried to expound in the simplest possible form, as I wish to avoid even the appearance of argumentation. It is not my wish to attempt to prove anybody wrong, but only to be convinced of the truth whatever that may be; so I have thrown all my defences open, so far as I have been able.

On the top of all this egotism may I add a little more? as I do wish as far as possible to put before you all the facts —others besides those on which I desire to consult you.

1. So far as my knowledge of myself extends, I believe that I am sincere, and that there is no selfish desire in me strong enough either to hold me where I am, or to send me to "Rome." Of course it is only too possible that I may be in a state of dreadful self-deception; but at least I am under the impression that I will submit to the Catholic Church—in fact, that I am already in a state of submission, so far as the gift of faith is granted me. Much of my darkness, however, if not all, may well be the result of sins against faith.

2. At present I am full of preaching engagements up to and beyond Easter, and at present I intend to fulfil them. If, however, these difficulties of mine appear adequately solved, and the interior drawing continues, I should contemplate cancelling my engagements, and living a retired life for some months before taking any further step—unless, that is, the call became insistent and irresistible, but at present I should be inclined to distrust such a call.

3. The question of Holy Orders does not much trouble me. I am sufficiently satisfied of my priesthood to have no scruple in ministering at the altar and to penitents. I am also sufficiently satisfied of the imperativeness of the voice of the "Catholic Church" to believe what I am told —at least, I hope so.

4. I fear I must ask you to regard my letters as altogether confidential. To say no more, my debt of gratitude to the Community of the Resurrection, of which I am a member, makes me eager to avoid anything that would unnecessarily injure its influence. But I should be extremely grateful if you would allow me to show anything that you might write to me, to my superior, with whom I am on terms of complete confidence on this matter, and to one or two other discreet friends. Those I have consulted so far have not helped me very much, except by the reassurance of their personal character and learning, and by the fact of their contentment with the position of the Church of England.

5. As regards my special reading on this subject, I have read several of the ordinary controversial text-books on either side: Dr. Rivington's, Mr. Richardson's, and one by a member of the Society of Jesus, on the Apostolic Office, and such answers to them as exist; and the result is pure bewilderment. All that I can deduce is that a devout and learned man can, sincerely, find in history exactly what he expects, and that every theory of Church order can equally be shown to be possible, or disproved, by the statements and significant silences of history; and that all that one can say is that some theories seem less out of the question than others. On the whole, however, the book that impressed me most deeply is Newman's *Development of Doctrine*—although every now and then I am suddenly seized with a distrust of his mind and methods.

What I think would be of most value to my state and

constitution of mind (though I dare say I am completely wrong) is a catena of Fathers, which I could verify, on the See of Peter as the necessary centre of unity, and the Petrine texts, as well as a reference to some book dealing with the schism of East and West dispassionately—giving, I mean, a record of facts with as little comment as possible. I have, of course, also consulted other writers on particular points.

6. The Reformation period seems to me the strongest argument for "Rome" in one sense. One has little doubt, given fortitude, on which side one would have been. So I need no pressure on that point. Yet, I find myself, by the Providence of God, in the English Communion, which, after all, has shown a marvellous sacramental vitality, and I feel bound to give great weight to that fact, so long as it is possible to remain in good faith.

Especially, dear sir, I ask the charity of your prayers. If, too, you could say a Mass for me, I should be deeply grateful. Some curious coincidences have taken place in my life in connection with devotion to the Holy Ghost and this subject, and if there were any devotions of the kind in which my needs could find a place, I feel sure that it would greatly help me.

I feel, indeed, how much I am asking of you, and how great my debt of gratitude will be if you should help me, in any direction, towards a solution of these difficulties.

If any expressions in my letter, or in the enclosure, seem to you presumptuous or offensive in any way, may I ask your pardon beforehand?

Believe me, dear and rev. sir, yours faithfully in Christ,

HUGH BENSON.

The Rev. Fr. TYRRELL.

Disastrously enough, one page only, numbered 8, of Father Tyrrell's answer survives. It contains a very clear and theological note on the first suggestion in section iv. of the statement, and the beginning of a note on section v. In his letter the priest distinguished carefully between the dogma of the Church—the wording of the Vatican formula he considered "minimising"—and the practical policy and tone, so to speak, of the Church, which he called maxi-

mising. He being a minimiser, could remain where he was, but felt a certain reluctance (which was not indeed logical, but had in it a certain delicacy of feeling with regard to the appropriate, and a tenderness of apprehension lest a convert, admitted on Tyrrell's lines, should find himself disillusioned and *dépaysé* in so alien an atmosphere) for "receiving" an inquirer. He ended by begging Benson to remember him in his mass, a request full of Tyrrell's irony, in any circumstances, and doubly so in these. At this time Tyrrell was not known, even among his associates, for the openly modernistic attitude he afterwards assumed, and had scarcely published even pseudonymously the books which afterwards made him so well known. Benson's eye was quite unlikely to detect the theological flaws or dangerous tendencies which expert scholastics already observed in his books, and was, like so many others, utterly captivated by the indescribable charm of Tyrrell's style, the lucidity of his expositions, and the warmth of his charity still so noticeable.

"Father Tyrrell," he exclaims, "always seems to me to say the last possible word!"[1]

Disconcerted by Tyrrell's rebuff, he accepted for a moment the interpretation placed upon it by those whose judgment he valued, and decided he was meant to stay where he was. Almost immediately the pendulum swung back, and he implored leave to cancel his winter engagements. Superiors prescribed the drug of work, and kept him to it.

He put himself in touch, however, with the Rev. Spencer Jones, in whom, if in anyone, he felt, he could find help in his difficulties.

The Rev. Spencer J. Jones, rector of Moreton-in-the-Marsh, was invited in November, 1899, by the Association

[1] *Spiritual Letters*, p. 16.

for Promoting the Unity of Christendom (the A.P.U.C.) to preach one of a series of sermons, bearing upon reunion, on the Saints' days of 1900. The feast of St. Peter was ceded to Mr. Spencer Jones, at his request, owing to his attention having recently been focused on the Petrine aspect of Church unity by a book published in 1895 (*The Gift of the Keys*) by Canon Everest of Truro, an Anglican. From November, 1899, to June, 1900, Mr. Spencer Jones prepared his address, which was in fact delivered to a select audience of men profoundly interested in the ideals of the A.P.U.C. The address, which was prefaced by a Bidding Prayer, lasted an hour and a half; and, having been invited afterwards to publish it, Mr. Spencer Jones found that it grew beneath his hands to the dimensions of a book, which appeared on January 13, 1902, under the title, *England and the Holy See, an Essay towards the Reunion of Christendom.* To this Lord Halifax contributed an Introduction. A first edition ran out in eight months; and later in the same year (1902) a cheaper and much abridged edition appeared and proved so permanently popular that it has been issued in a cheap shilling form as late as the end of 1914.

It is by the courtesy of Mr. Spencer Jones himself that I am able to give what I can safely assert to be an equitable account of his thesis.

It is assumed that reunion among Christians is a consummation to be hoped and worked for. The ideal has been pursued, however, with too much sentiment, too little of the scientific spirit. Science observes; makes experiments; travels towards hypothesis, adopting a "working hypothesis" directly it can; and thence, to theory. Thus, in politics, a Bill precedes an Act. But as a Bill will be discussed as though it were already on the

statute book, so hypotheses must be discussed as though they were already ascertained facts.

Let us assume as hypothesis, *Rome is Right*. All discussions hitherto have assumed anything and everything except this. Yet, as the route by which Ladysmith was actually relieved was the one route pronounced by experts on the spot to be impossible, so the rightness of Rome may prove to be the one hypothesis always needed and never made.

Now: if none of the Christian bodies consent to *change*, reunion clearly, even approximation, is impossible. Each body then must consent to change "after its kind," when and as it can. Now consider Rome, unique among Christian bodies for its commanding position, its numbers, and its claim to infallibility. Rome can change in discipline, not in dogma. Hence, towards reunion, she can, by the law of her organism, contribute modifications in the former, "explanations" of the latter: that is all. To ask more, is to ask her for suicide. She could not even begin to change herself structurally, *i.e.* dogmatically, because, the essential law of her existence being Infallibility, to annul that would mean to take her own life. But no other community, however wrong, need be doomed if it changes; they all *can* alter their fundamental laws, because they do not profess, they explicitly deprecate, their own infallibility; and, in history, they *have* so changed.

England's relation with Rome is unique. England is of all nations, Duchesne has said, that one whose ecclesiastical origins are linked most evidently with the Apostolic See. Henry's "act of supremacy" was an act of violence and fraud which wrenched England away from the Rome of his day despite herself: modern Englishmen cannot be assumed even to understand the Roman position they controvert.

Since Anglicans admit Roman Orders, but Rome does not admit Anglican, it is but reasonable for the former to accept the ordination rite of the latter, but unreasonable to expect Rome to accept that of England.

That corporate reunion is possible, is proved (we now see), on a small scale, by the Franciscans of New York, and, on a larger, by various Eastern Communities.

Mr. Spencer Jones, having formulated this theory, proceeded to argue that it should not prove impossible for Anglicans to see their way to reducing it to practice, and to join in establishing, no mere friendly confederation of Churches organically separated, but a single body, professing one faith, using identical sacraments, in subordination, not only *de facto* accepted but *de iure* imposed, to the Apostolic See. Indeed, the Pope, it could be already held by them, is the Head of the Church not merely *de iure ecclesiastico*, but *de iure divino*, and is to have been so appointed by Christ not alone politically, for government, but spiritually, for teaching. Hence even infallibility may be predicated of him, inasmuch Christ promised inerrancy to His Church as a whole, and she may express her universal faith not only through the general belief and practice of her children, or the collective voice of her bishops in council, but through her Supreme Pastor regarded not as a separate oracle but as the mouthpiece of the whole.[1] Union with Rome was necessary not alone for the *bene esse* of a Church, but normally and in the long run for its *esse*. A dislocated limb is not *eo ipso* dead, though, if it be not swiftly restored to its proper play within its socket, it will soon need amputation, and meanwhile it suffers and is relatively useless.

[1] Contemporary Catholic appreciation of Mr. Spencer Jones's book, and the theological elucidation of this point in particular, may be judged by three leading articles in the *Tablet*, March 15 and 22, and April 5, 1902.

Reunion, therefore, must be zealously sought for; but, for those who believed the Anglican Church to be thus sick and dislocated, *corporate* reunion might be ambitioned. He only who believed himself to be, because within the Anglican Church, therefore outside the body of the Catholic Church, need feel individual submission to be imperative. Were it asked of men who professed their conviction that the Pope's voice was infallible in faith and morals, why they did not submit to the unvarying utterance of Rome—that the Anglican Church was no Church, and that it was the duty of each Anglican to "come in," the answer was the old appeal from the Pope ill-informed to the Pope better-informed: the Italian Curia as probably misunderstood the Anglican position as average Englishmen quite certainly were ignorant of the real doctrine and guarantees of Roman Catholicism. But a disciplinary decree based on a misunderstanding could be disregarded; while if the Anglican Church *were* a part of the Catholic Church, the Pope's voice, uttering what she disbelieved in, was speaking not according to the faith of the Church as a whole, and was therefore not infallible.[1]

Benson, as a direct consequence of his study of Mr. Spencer Jones's book, wrote to him in May, 1902, as follows:

HOUSE OF THE RESURRECTION, MIRFIELD,
May, 1902.

DEAR BROTHER,—Will you pardon a complete stranger writing to you on the subject of your most interesting book *England and the Holy See?* I borrowed a copy the

[1] Of quite modern defenders of this position the Rev. Ronald Knox, the son of the Bishop of Manchester, is, I imagine, the best known and certainly the most brilliant; he, in his *Reunion all Round*, reduces the venerable idea of reunion by any means other than Rome to so relentless an *absurdum*, that he makes his readers fear for the validity of his own case.

other day which I must return immediately; and we have not yet a copy of our own here, so that I am not sure that I will be able to look up any references in it to which you might direct my attention, should you care to answer my letter.

But I write to ask a question which possibly you may not wish to answer, but I am encouraged from your book to hope that you will; but if you do not care to answer it I shall perfectly understand that it is a subject you might not wish to discuss with a stranger. But before I ask it, may I say how deeply interested I am in the book, and how completely, so far as I have had time and possess capacity to study it, my own opinions accord with those put forward in it?

You seem, apart from details, to establish—(1) that the Primacy of Peter is of Divine origin; (2) that there is no demand made by the See of Peter, to be held *de fide* as a term of communion, which is impossible to concede.

Therefore, does it not seem a duty to submit to that See? For Rome herself states, normally, that it is necessary to salvation: and, granted (1), I do not see what obstacle can justify anyone, priest or layman, in refusing to obey the call of him whom our Blessed Lord appointed to rule His Church. For if (1) is true, surely there can be no jurisdiction apart from that divinely appointed Head.

There are, of course, many reasons for hesitation: the fact of having implicitly to deny the validity of one's own sacramental acts, if that is to say, one is to serve as a priest in the Roman Church; the fact of finding oneself placed providentially in this part of Christendom; the fear of being blinded by the extreme discomforts of the Anglican position—are all sufficient to make one hesitate a considerable time before taking such a serious step.

But I wish to get the ground clear, so far as may be, before anything else; and your own book stating, as it does, so many of my own convictions, and emanating, as it does, from one who is still content to minister in the Church of England, has encouraged me to ask whether you can give me further data or references in the direction I have indicated.

May I add further that I am aware that many, with great reason, believe that the Church of England has a work to do in the world of a peculiar delicacy. But this

scarcely justifies one who believes in the Primacy of Peter from remaining in her if she is schismatic—quite apart from the fact that she permits heresies to be openly confessed and taught by her accredited teachers. I have read the common and more recent books of controversy on both sides; but there seems to me to be too much dust of battle and of partisan feeling in them to be of much use in clearing one's own vision.

I am afraid this letter is most inadequate—yet I hope it will be sufficiently clear in putting before you my particular difficulty.

I shall be grateful if you will be kind enough to regard this letter as strictly confidential. If you wish your letter to be regarded in the same way would you kindly mark it so? But if you can see your way to it, I should be grateful if you will allow me to discuss your answer with one or two friends, and especially with the Superior of the Community, Fr. Frere.

Believe me, yours faithfully in O.B.L.,

HUGH BENSON.

P.S.—I would like to add one word more.

The commonly held Anglican theory of Church government, in its best form, appears to be that all bishops are essentially equal, not only in the sacerdotium, but as regards government; and that the Primacy of Rome, like a Patriarchate or like the Primacy of Canterbury, may be for the *bene esse*, but not *esse* of the Church—not, that is to say, of Divine origin. And next, that there are certain demands made by Rome, that may be true in themselves, but uncatholic in that they are unjustifiable terms of communion; and that therefore for the sake of the liberty of truth Anglicans may at any rate resist what would otherwise be for the peace of the Church. This, if it is held, appears a reasonable ground for remaining in the Anglican Communion—but, as I understand your book, you tend, at least, to demolish this theory.

As regards infallibility; that does not seem a difficulty. Granted the Divine origin of the Primacy of Peter, that Primacy is an essential mark of the Church; and if one holds—as I myself certainly do—the infallibility of the "Church," that infallibility must certainly reside in the communion of Peter. But I have been accustomed to believe and teach that the infallible authority resided in

the consent of Christendom—whether conciliar or diffusive. This of course stands or falls, as a possible theory, with the Anglican conception that I have tried to state above.

Please understand how fully aware I am of the inadequacy of this letter. But I have deliberately omitted all that appears to be of the nature of side-issues; on the understanding that in the main I believe that I hold very much what your book would lead me to think that you yourself hold. H. B.

Mr. Spencer Jones answered, never having met Father Benson, but knowing him by reputation only, in a letter which was either lent and not returned, or, I surmise, in consequence of some explicit request, destroyed, for at this period and later Benson kept letters quite regardless of the triviality or the reverse of their contents. He emphasized, however, his desire that Father Benson should keep his Superior continuously informed of the correspondence thus initiated. On May 23 Benson answered by a short note, expressing his fear lest he might be yielding to the temptation to desert a "difficult and it may be all but untenable position in the battle, and yet a vital one, for one of comparative ease and security." To disentangle motives was deplorably difficult. Hence the value of Mr. Spencer Jones's book, which diverted attention from self to objective facts. Yet self-knowledge was necessary to avoid a biased interpretation of those very facts. . . . How imperative, then, to hesitate!

On May 27, he followed this up with a letter in which, after deploring the fact that men who deny dogmas explicitly stated in the Creeds—such as the Virgin Birth—are tolerated in the Church of England, he continues:

What you say about Round Table conferences is most interesting and most inspiring, and I hope really that the idea will not be allowed to drop altogether. The very fact

of holding such a conference, apart from any intrinsic good that might result, would awaken people to the fact of the disunion of Catholic Christendom. The saddest fact about the whole question is that the majority of Englishmen take it for granted (1) that the Church of England approximates towards Protestantism, and that reunion with them and the recognition of Protestant principles are natural and obvious things to be desired; (2) that the Church of England is separated by an impassable gulf from Catholic Christendom, and that reunion in that direction is impossible, and the desire for it disloyal.

And a little later he says:

The book that you speak of, to come out in two years' time, is just what is needed. The modern controversial books seem to me hopelessly inadequate. They are too obviously and confessedly written for a purpose; and many of them, no doubt in good faith, omit things that seem to oneself vital, but which seem to the writers as beside the point: *e.g.* the strongest argument, to my mind, against Rome, consists in the remarkable omissions in the Fathers, &c. St. Vincent and St. Chrysostom both give an account of steps to be taken to ascertain what is the Faith, which, as it appears to me, could not by any stretch of imagination have been written by a modern Roman doctor—not from what they do say but from what they don't say. Now that is the kind of argument one wants thoroughly dealing with; especially by parallel passages in more modern divines, showing, *e.g.*, that the Primacy of Rome and the necessity of communion with her was so obviously taken for granted that these saints did not mention it. One wants to have the broad historical situation before one and not minute wrestlings over detail, and sometimes little schoolboy slaps at opponents. A large book consisting chiefly of extracts, with few or no comments, except purely historical, would, it seems to me, meet this want in a way it has never been met yet. And I do hope and pray there may be no disputed passages in the book: disputed, I mean, as to their authenticity. There is nothing that causes more miserable confusion and imputing of evil motives and bitter sarcasm on both sides than that.

The hoped-for conferences were made possible when, in February, 1903, it was decided to form a society of men in sympathy with the drift of Mr. Spencer Jones's essay. The inaugural lecture was given in October, 1903, to the Society of St. Thomas of Canterbury, and was published under the title of *Rome and Reunion*. The book which Benson hails as needed and imminent never appeared in that form. Its place may have been taken by, *e.g.*, *The Prince of the Apostles*, to which Mr. Spencer Jones contributed a preface and some of the chapters. After the letter of May 27, Benson wrote no more to Mr. Spencer Jones till he had been received into the Church in the September of 1903, and indeed announced that event to him neither before nor after its occurrence, though he knew Mr. Spencer Jones had been familiar with Woodchester. This I somehow find characteristic: he was at all times singularly detached from persons: it was in moments of enthusiasm, *e.g.* after reading a book by an author which had struck him, that he would neglect convention and introduce himself: he rarely looked backwards, least of all, perhaps, when, as at Woodchester, his whole attention was fixed upon the future. However, this singular acquaintance was not altogether dropped. The Society of St. Thomas of Canterbury meets in May and November, and it is a rule that the May meeting should be addressed by a Catholic. In May, 1908, at Mr. Spencer Jones's request, Father Benson gave the lecture, taking, once more at the Society's request, "some aspect of Infallibility" to speak upon. His lecture has since been published by the Catholic Truth Society under the title of *Infallibility and Tradition*.[1]

[1] A pleasant little incident survives. "On that occasion," writes Mr. Spencer Jones, who had never seen Benson, and was never to meet him again, "I remember when we were waiting for people to arrive, Fr. Sydney Smith

Benson with considerable acumen fastened on the vital point of this discussion, namely, the relation of the Pope's infallibility to that of the Church as a whole. It was long before he fully satisfied himself as to the sense in which the Pope's infallibility could be regarded as separate, or whether papal pronouncements had any right to be more than *expressions* of the general belief. Were the papal words, so to say, put into his mouth as the result of Catholic belief, or could the Pope so speak as to *form* Catholic belief from above? He was helped towards solving this difficult question in the Catholic sense by his monarchial predispositions and his entire detestation of dictatorial democracy;[1] but he struggled for a long time, in the interests of reconciling the papal supremacy with the theory of the Church Diffusive, to assign to the Pope something of that position which Father Tyrrell, writing as Ernst Engels, did in *The Church and the Future.*

Meanwhile he put himself into touch with Father David Richards, whom he had known at Cambridge and East Malling. Father Richards was a young man of quite exceptionally gentle and lovable character, and his letters have much fragrance of affection and reveal a readiness to serve his friend to the utmost of his power. He had been for some time chaplain to the East Malling nuns; had

said to me, 'I suppose you will begin soon?' to which I replied, 'When Father Hugh arrives.' 'I am Father Hugh,' said the priest who was standing by his side. He looked to me almost a boy, I remember."

[1] "Personally," he wrote in 1902, being exercised at the time by the thought of the Boer war, "I believe that we are beginning to rot. Every nation has its chance, and loses it: and I think we are showing signs of having done that. [. . .] I am getting rather upset at the way the Church of England is going on. It appears to me that she is being guided by popular clamour, instead of herself guiding it. And this is upsetting to me who believe that the Church is a monarchy, and *in no sense* a republic. This hateful democratic spirit is even daring to lay hands on the Ark itself."

been received into the Church, and ordained at Rome. He was to become, a little later, a member of the Dominican Order, and it was owing to this that Father Benson made his way to Woodchester for reception. Father Richards died in Mexico of consumption.

Father Benson began to write regularly to Father Richards about the middle of July, 1902; but the first letter, which shows that he had asked the Catholic priest for information upon the quality of his theory of the papal claim, is dated 1st December [1901]. In it Father Richards says that he has submitted the difficulty to sundry theologians, one of whom, Prior Vincent McNabb, O.P., then Prior of Woodchester and now of Hawkesyard, Rugeley, wrote out an excellent memorandum on the subject. The essence of his answer was, naturally, that while there is only one "infallibility" granted by Christ, so that no rivalry, as it were, of infallibilities is conceivable, infallible Pope proclaiming against infallible Church, yet infallibility is properly granted to those who possess it *ex sese*, that is, directly and not derivatively. Thus the Pope can speak immediately, and yet infallibly, nor does he *need* to consult the Church before speaking, though he may do so, and possibly ought to, and usually does.[1] By far the most solemn definition of recent times is that of the Immaculate Conception. This was, however, given after prolonged consultation only: equally certain is it, that no appeal is now theologically conceivable from the voice of a defining Pope to a Council claiming, so to say, perhaps to override the papal pronouncement.

[1] Much confusion of mind exists among non-Catholics by failing to distinguish between infallibility, which is a negative charisma, and inspiration. Infallibility means that the Pope is prevented from teaching error *ex cathedra*; not that he need receive any special and divine illumination in that teaching, such as is essential to inspiration, nor indeed that he need so teach at all, *i.e.* so far as the actual gift of infallibility is concerned.

"Needless to say, I did not tell [Father McNabb] your name," writes Father Richards, "or that you were on the point of making your submission to the Holy See."

Either then Father Richards misinterpreted Benson's nearness to the Church, or the pendulum had swung nearer Rome for the moment than it was to remain.

However, Benson had come across some phrases which, if they were accurately quoted (and this I think possible), presumably came from the frantic pen of some French journalist. The Pope was called "Spouse and Co-partner of the Church"; the Depositum Fidei was "lodged in his brain"; a French bishop was fantastically represented as saying that the Pope was the Incarnation of the Holy Ghost. From these absurdities, which were either never spoken, or were due to a rhetoric detestable in taste and (objectively considered) heretical in their essence, Father Richards had not the slightest difficulty in turning Benson's mind to the necessary dogma and the authoritative meaning of its formula.

Besides Father McNabb, Dom John Chapman, O.S.B., of Erdington, was being enlisted by Father Richards to help his friend. Dom John had received Father Richards into the Church, and to him Father Richards used to forward Benson's letters, which profoundly impressed him with the candour and intelligence of their writer. The name and address were at first carefully cut out, so that the identity of the writer was kept concealed. Dom John helped Benson much, from the immense resources of his patristic knowledge, in regard to historical questions relating to the earlier ages of Christianity and the Papacy in its less developed form; in fact, from him Benson went nearer than ever else towards getting that catena of patristic proof he needed. Dom John showed

Benson's letters to his colleague, Dom Bede Camm, well known for his historical works upon the English Martyrs and the Reformation period generally; so Benson had enlisted on his side experts who should guide his dogmatic inquiries and historical researches ancient and modern alike.

In Lent, Benson was sent with Father G. Waldegrave Hart to conduct a mission at St. Giles's, Cambridge. It was the last he was to preach as an Anglican, and it was to him a source of mingled joy and horror. As a mission it was successful. "Your sermons," wrote the Rev. J. Buxton, the vicar, "have had more effect in stirring men to think than any effort of the kind which has been made for them at St. Giles's since I came here." Yet, again and again, after his sermon, he would come back to the room he shared with Father Hart, and, burying his face in his hands, would groan, "I *can't* go on." To preach, when perchance he had not been "sent," was agony to him.[1]

On Easter Sunday he preached on St. Mary Magdalene at Tunbridge Wells, and never again entered an Anglican pulpit.

Very exhausted and depressed he went to Tremans "for peace and quiet." There he found his two brothers, and after a time complained that he was being drawn by them into theological discussions. "But, to be quite honest," wrote Mr. A. C. Benson on April 20, "you have of late become so silent on other topics that it is difficult to know quite what to talk about—and as a family we must talk, or, like the lady in Tennyson, *we shall die.*"

[1] This mission gave him new light upon the conditions of people he had long lived among. He wrote to a friend: "Bedmakers and gyps have a harder time than I ever thought. Did you realise that a bedmaker *cannot* receive Holy Communion in term time unless she has a special service before 6 o'clock A.M.?"

Hugh recognised that, though he undoubtedly felt "chivied," he could not free his talk from the obsession of his thoughts, and found his brothers nothing but what was "generous and affectionate." There was no suggestion that any sort of quarrel might be threatened, nor that he would find it difficult, at any time, to visit his home.

At this time his position was communicated to the Community at Mirfield, who themselves behaved with nothing but tact, affection, and simplicity. He communicates, too, his distress to the one solitary correspondent from whom to the end he held but little back.

April 20 [1903].—I am greatly disturbed in my mind about the Church of England. It is a dreary old story, I fear, to us all; and the air is full of discomfort; but this has "infected" me somehow.

He has had this trouble, he explains, for rather more than a year. Father Frere has known it all that time, and has given him leave "to stay at Mirfield without any external work for two or three months and devote my prayers and mind to the subject." External work leaves no time or energy. "Work," indeed, "as an antidote has been unsuccessful."

He foresees that many will consider this to be an act of cowardly and thoughtless apostasy, and a betrayal of our Lord's confidence. Herein, however, his conscience is clear, while

The question of Orders does not come in at all in my difficulties. So far as history and spiritual experience go, I am entirely satisfied that I am a priest; and am continuing to say Mass with complete serenity. In fact, if all else seems shaken, that remains secure. It may sound a callous thing to say; but as far as I myself am concerned, I am entirely serene, and not at all upset or anxious.

One does feel confident that all is in God's Hands. Neither do I feel anything but love and honour for the Church of England; and, please God, whatever happens, that will continue.

He writes again upon this subject on April 23, St. George's Day, 1903. His correspondent, on her side, is to listen to no doubts. She, as he, "is in complete peace as regards Sacramental Grace in the Church of England." It would be intolerable otherwise. But God seems to be "opening new doors without exactly closing old ones."

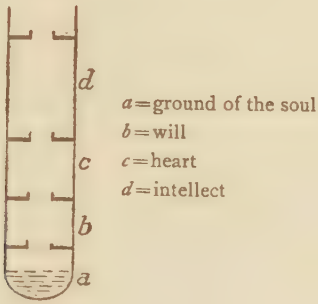
He is convinced, moreover, that the spirit directing them is from God, and quotes St. Ignatius's doctrine that the Good Spirit should generate peace.

Mirfield itself was an "abode of peace" after work. "I am working away at a book of fourteenth-century devotions that I hope to publish sometime; and they generate such a happy atmosphere." In these simple prayers his spirit found, perhaps, its only refreshment during these arid months.

Anticipating, I will quote a long letter in which he at once guides his penitent in the first stages of her "conversion" and indicates to us his method as regards his own.

May 4 [1903]. . . . As regards the other matters, I entirely agree that you should keep yourself from decision so long as you are in this state of health. In fact, the only satisfactory decisions that are ever made, I think, are those in which God forms a conviction from the bottom of the soul upwards, so to speak, so that when it reaches the top and emerges into action and manifestation it is beyond all question or reconsideration a solid conviction of one's entire personality. . . . Of course all that needs patience and tranquillity; but it is worth great struggles after self-repression to win the solidity of such a conviction. [. . .]

One's soul is in departments. Let me illustrate by a diagram. So long as one is in grace, in the "ground of the soul" there is always the "spring of water" of which Our Lord spoke to the Samaritan woman. This spring is continually rising and falling. For perfect sanctification it ought to be continually at high flood,



right up through *b*, *c*, and *d*; *i.e.* the will should be converted, the heart kindled, and the intellect illuminated. And that process ought to be practically always in that order. First, the will should be converted, so that one is entirely resigned, and only desirous of knowing God's will; then the heart is drawn to love it. One becomes full of burning desire—and at last the intellect understands and perceives.

Now, for a complete *conviction* of anything, all these compartments of the soul should be filled; *i.e.* however much one's heart may love the Roman system and circumstances, yet one *must not* go until the intellect is either "informed" as to difficulties, or at least "satisfied" that there is an explanation somewhere. [. . .]

If you apply [this thought] to all kinds of souls and circumstances, it seems to work out. At the conversion of an ignorant sinner, it is wonderful to see how the fountain of water that has always been there, though at a very low ebb, suddenly rises in a flood and penetrates every part of his being; so that he loves and prefers religion to irreligion, and all his intellectual difficulties are simply swept away at once. Then after conversion it generally ebbs a little; and the work of sanctification consists in the perpetual movement and flow of the

"water of life." Every good act of the soul sets it in motion; every sin drives it down again.[1]

On her side his mother wrote:

April 23. . . . What you say about controversy makes me say what has been hovering in my mind of late. You said some little time ago that you felt you knew thoroughly the side you had been brought up in, and that there was no need to go into that any more. I didn't think it quite sound at the time, but I scarcely knew why, and now I have a clearer view. This—I think your *present* place is clear to you—that must be. But I think the thing, or view, one was brought up in is often by no means so clear to one in its reasonable largeness as the views one has come into later. One takes so much for granted in the early years without reasonable examination. Might not it be well, at this critical juncture, in order that *no* pains may be spared *to omit nothing* of *the whole case*, that you should go into it thoroughly with some moderate person who has thought out his position? Of course the Archbishop occurs to my mind, merely because he is so very moderate, reasonable, and fair, and because I am sure he would do anything for your father's son. I haven't breathed a word to him about wanting this—and of course you may prefer someone else, even if my feeling about doing the thing commends itself. Still, I would *urge* it on your consideration. I want you to leave nothing undone which would in any way really contribute to a knowledge all round.

No letter could have been more fearlessly generous, more large and loyal. Yet one can see that it will be able to influence Hugh's mind but little, though it will direct his behaviour. There are moments when a man knows well enough whether his education has indeed ministered adequately to the exigencies of his life; he gauges his

[1] This ingenious analogy suffers from all the difficulties attendant on any division of the soul into "faculties." Where has the "water" sunk to during sin? What if *a* becomes converted, but not *c*; or *a*, *b*, and *d*, and not *c*? The department *c* is a very difficult one to define in strict psychology. On the whole, I think Benson would, later on, have inverted the departments *c* and *b*.

power of living off his education, by an innermost experience. At a crisis, a man can look round, see what his sanctioned past has offered him, and can exclaim, "I am dying of this." A nervous man, moreover, tender and delicate to a fault in his affections and pieties, may suddenly feel that his temper is at snapping-point; "I cannot stand," he avows, "hearing those arguments again." Courtesy can only be ensured at the cost of a kind of general deadening of the emotions. Finally, the very word "moderation" may lash him to indignation. Moderation, he feels, will never settle anything to do with Christianity. *Νῆφε καὶ μέμνασ' ἀπιστεῖν*,[1] wrote the cynical poet; "a godly, righteous, and sober life," the Anglican prayer-book asks: "Blood of Christ, inebriate me," are the words of a Catholic prayer Hugh loved. Quite apart from his absolutely clear perception of the ultimate scepticism implied in much of the cult of "moderation," Hugh felt that any creed that was true demanded a tremendous self-surrender. "I believe," one wrote timidly to him in later years, "that if only I could find myself in Catholicism, I could swim." "Then, for God's sake," he answered, "jump!"

For the sake of long affection he denied himself the happiness of a quick adventure, and returned to plod, at Mirfield, at the books. Only, the Community were once more apprised of his pain, and betook themselves to prayer and kindly silence.

Early in May, Father Richards writes to him again, offering once more the hospitality of Woodchester, its peace and width of welcome, and wise "leaving a man alone."[2] For the second time, the predestined name of

[1] "Be sober, and remember to distrust."

[2] "You," said Newman once to Dr. Russell of Maynooth, "did more than any other to convert me!" "How?" asked the astonished priest. "By letting me alone," said Newman.

Father Reginald Buckler recurs beneath his pen. Meanwhile, the web of prayers Father Benson will so often draw around his converts, is closing in upon himself. The Dominican nuns have long been praying for him. . . . Often the Mass is being offered for him. . . . Only, Father Richards urges, let his soul remain alert. A film of Quietism, so to say, has dulled the sharp colour of his letters lately. . . . Herein is reflected that numbness which Benson's overstrain of soul was bringing on him. Two days later Father Richards recurs to Quietism, and mentions the Preface, by Father Wilberforce, O.P., to Blosius's *Institutio Spiritualis*, edited by him. The spiritual waters, going softly, should refresh the wastes of controversy: he has already recommended Manning's *Temporal Mission of the Holy Ghost;* again, the "short pithy sentences" in that part of Newman's *Loss and Gain* entitled *Questions for One whom it Concerns* are thought by him suited to stimulate the soul flagging beneath the concatenated arguments. Finally, he bids him "rest his mind," wearied of the study of the Church's "notes" of unity, apostolicity, and the like, by the quiet contemplation of her great glow of Sanctity.

He was not, however, to find his rest, from books or persons, for a while.

His Superior visited Tremans, and on May 27, 1903, Mrs. Benson wrote:

> . . . It has been so good having Father Frere here—he is *delightful*, and I don't wonder at your fondness for him. We talked long and late. I lay awake nearly all night in the thought of you, and at 7.30 he celebrated . . . it calmed all, and made one strong for whatever has to be borne.
>
> He read your letter quietly through—so I know all your mind as expressed there. I feel scarcely to know what you and he will come to in talk to-morrow—but I cannot believe that in dealing with a man like that, and

you, there need be, or will be, any bitterness, or rash action, or anything for which there should be regret. . . . One thing he comforted me upon—he is quite clear about your coming home on June 15. That is what I crave for.

You know how strongly I have felt with you that none but the *great issues* should be considered, and you will realise how I have kept all personal feelings out of it to the best of my ability. You know well enough what a terrible blow any such step would be to me if I looked at it personally—what a sorrow it must be, if it happens. But this is not the level on which I take it with my heart and will. I know your utter sincerity of heart, and I only desire that knowledge and thought should come up to that—and I am not unmindful—dearest son, how *could* I be?—of all your pain and conflict and patience—and all the gentleness and sweetness which have been growing greater day by day.

Father Frere told me of Lord Halifax's desire that you should go out to Italy and see him . . . and now in answer to your tender and dutiful wish to see anyone I should like you to see, may I say that I *do* strongly desire that you should see him.

I can't forget how good he was to you in 1901, and I know how sweet and altogether acceptable his atmosphere and way of looking at things is to you. So I am not asking a hard thing. . . .

No one, Mrs. Benson adds, not even the Community, can wish save that you should follow God's guidance "when all has been done." The Whitsunday and All Saints' collects were felt by her to bring home to the soul the facts of "the guidance of the Comforter and the vision of the Blessed Dead."

Meanwhile he was back in controversy. Father Richards himself, at Benson's wish, had to take to argument, though none that I else have seen has been so sweetened by the charm and humility of the writer. "But perhaps," he concludes an argument from authority which in effect weighed much with Benson, "I speak as a fool, indeed I am sure I do, if there is anything of my own

in what I say. . . . Please tell me if my letters worry or distract you. Yours help me not a little, for they assist me to look at the matter from the point of view of another mind; and perhaps I am too apt to fancy that the road I came on is the only one that leads to Rome.—Always yours affectionately."[1]

At Mirfield his reading was terrific in extent. His *Confessions* mention a dismal list: "Dr. Gore's books, Salmon on Infallibility, Richardson, Pusey, Ryder, Littledale, Puller, Darwell Stone, Percival, Mortimer, Mallock, Rivington; . . . a brilliant MS. book on Elizabethan history . . . and, supremely, Newman's *Development* and Mozley's answer" (p. 99). "To me," he wrote,[2] "(Newman) is *the* Prophet, but to many I know he is merely sophistical."

But from these a few stand out.

To Father G. Waldegrave Hart he wrote on May 19:[3]

But I have just been reading to-day an *irresistible* book —Mallock's *Doctrine and Doctrinal Disruption.* MY WORD! It is a *masterpiece.* Really, honestly, I have practically no further doubts.

I wrote to the Superior yesterday, telling him how imminent was my departure, and I feel almost inclined to wire to-day. But I shall wait about three or four weeks more, and then retire to Retreat.

This is all very sad.

[1] It is pathetic to notice that one of Benson's by-difficulties, so to call them, was the view the Church took about cruelty to animals and the survival of their "souls." Father Richards collected a good deal of theological material on the topic and forwarded it, with much tolerance of view and wise comment, to Benson.

[2] *Spiritual Letters*, p. 31.

[3] It is in this letter that a note of intimate pathos occurs. Father Hart was ill. "I am *grieved* to hear you aren't out of pain yet," Benson writes. "But 'Nay now, it's drawing it out—be still, child.'" These phrases were familiar upon the lips of his old nurse, Beth, who used them in the nursery when mustard plasters had to be applied to her restive babies. At this crisis in Hugh's spiritual growth the words recurred, the more easily because he was schooling himself, mentally, to become once more a little child.

"Mallock," he wrote again (*Spiritual Letters*, p. 31), "is simply overwhelming, and he is not a Roman Catholic."

Another book whose name often recurs in the letters of this period, though not as frequently as Mallock's, is *Reunion Essays*, by Father Carson. In May, 1903, Hugh writes to Rev. J. H. Molesworth:

> I have just been reading a fascinating book by Carson, a Roman priest, called *Reunion Essays*. Have you seen it? Its description of the Roman Church as an embryo, showing the same characteristics, is very able. He is a disciple of Newman, and a great Liberal in theology—remarkably so. In fact, he quotes our divines a good deal more than his own, especially Gore, though he can't follow him in the "kenotic theories" of "Lux Mundi," &c. It is really worth reading from every point of view.

Father Carson's book was considered in some points unsatisfactory by Roman Catholic theologians. This is not the place to discuss the extent or character of its shortcomings. These need not, at any rate, have been such as to preclude it from helping Benson on his Rome-ward way.

But in May he definitely began to struggle. You may have seen an animal, which you had thought numbed, if not to dying point, at least to non-resistance, fight frantically, on a sudden, for its life, and then collapse. The fight at least had come. Hugh loved Mirfield, but for the moment all he asks is to escape. He begged to be released at once from his obligations, and to go and stay in a Catholic convent. The atmosphere was stifling him; the chains were breaking him down.

His Superior, in a kind yet most reasonably firm communication, told him that it was impossible for the Community or for himself to allow him to go and stay in a Roman Catholic convent as long as he was a

member of a Community which was in all loyalty bound to a Church whose authority and communion such a convent would repudiate. His "pledge," he urged, still bound him, and he could not be released till late in August. Profession doubtless was of varying value and import to different brethren; but Benson had wished to feel himself to be more and not less definitely pledged to the Community. To go over to Rome, Fr. Frere declared, was wrong, an error in judgment, a defiance of authority, a repudiation of sacraments and graces received, and therefore sacrilege. This the Community might grievedly contemplate, but not *facilitate*. To Benson, his request for retreat in a Catholic convent might appear on a par with that for leave to write to Father Tyrrell and Father Richards. No; that had been a policy of hope, in order to keep Hugh back, though even to write to Tyrrell appeared to involve some slight disloyalty. "To our utter surprise, the answer was a more definite decision in that sense than you or I had conceived to be possible; and . . . I cannot but think that in that unexpected way to which we were strangely led you had your real guidance from God." Anyhow, he repeated, what Hugh needed was not retreat and peace, but "serious examination of the reasonable grounds by which your faith ought to be supported; it is your intellect that you have need to give fair play to, rather than your soul." Benson had, unknowingly, *shirked;* he had "an unreasoning dread of and grudge against reason and intellect."

You are like a man looking about for a surveyor to come and guarantee to him that the foundations of his house are secure, rather than run the risk of examining them and finding them insecure; they are secure enough all

the time, or could quite easily be made so; but he daren't face the risk that it might be otherwise, or contemplate the possibility of making necessary alterations or repairs in order to make them secure. [He instances Benson's terror of Biblical criticism.] Some [he continues] keep up their "blind refusal" after going over, to the end, as, for instance, Manning, with the result that other honesty besides intellectual honesty has become warped and conscience has ceased to protest in that sphere. Others, like Hutton, Addis, Bradley, and Co., relapse into Rationalism or Unitarianism under the angry revenge of the intellect. Others, finally, . . . come back to the faith.

This was heavier artillery, it may be, than was realised by the author of the letter which we have summarised. Apart from his condemning the jaded man to a further instalment of his Sisyphus task, he roused also in his brain the spectres of a possible moral collapse, or destined rationalism; of a defiance of God's will already, it may be, accomplished, and yet worse projected. Those who play on these strings scarcely know how terrific is the reverberation, in a tortured brain, of phrases like "return to the faith."

Benson wrestled yet once more. Might he put himself into "formal communication with Roman Catholic authorities during the thirteenth month?" Well, presumably, he might be absent, and no questions asked, should a Chapter agree to it. The Community could not grant even this "with its eyes open." That is, it could allow it to happen, but not explicitly arrange for it.

Meanwhile a measure of refreshment was to be given him. He might leave Mirfield from mid-June to mid-July, provided he keeps on neutral ground. He flies to Tremans as to a house of refuge; he will not wait even to pack, though in his heart he knows he will never return. Yet he, on his side, must tear himself away from the

house that clings to him. He kisses its doorposts as he goes, and his heart feels broken.[1]

II

At Tremans he found his brother Arthur, and from his book of reminiscences, *Hugh*, I will quote the following passages :

Hugh's dejection, which I think was reserved for his tired moments, was not apparent. To me, indeed, he appeared in the light of one intent on a great adventure, with all the rapture of confidence and excitement about him. As my mother said, he went to the shelter of his new creed as a lover might run to the arms of his beloved. Like the soldier in the old song, he did not linger, but "gave the bridle-reins a shake." He was not either melancholy or brooding. He looked very well, he was extremely active in mind and in body.

I find the following extract from my diary of August :

"*August*, 1903.—In the afternoon walked with Hugh the Paxhill round. Hugh is in very good, cheerful spirits, steering in a high wind straight to Rome, writing a historical novel, full of life and jests and laughter and cheerfulness ;

[1] J. H. Newman wrote to W. J. Copeland, of his final departure from Littlemore—"I quite tore myself away, and could not help kissing my bed, and mantelpiece, and other parts of the house. I have been most happy there, though in a state of suspense. And there it has been that I have both been taught my way and received an answer to my prayers." Mr. W. Ward has reminded us that so, too, Reding, in *Loss and Gain*, kisses the very willow-trees of Oxford when he must leave it.

Like Newman, too, Hugh looked wistfully back towards the home he was never to see again. "I have never seen Oxford since," Newman wrote wistfully in 1864, "excepting its spires, as they are seen from the railway." Fate was kinder to him than to Benson, and one day he did return. But for Newman to return to Oxford was an event of dimensions incomparably vaster than any return of Hugh's to any Mirfield.

Naturally it was felt awkward, at first, by Mirfield, to receive back one so frankly an "apostate"; besides, I understand that if permission to return had been granted to him, a precedent would have been set which in a particular instance it would prove difficult, though expedient, to avoid following. Individually, the Fathers of Mirfield showed themselves in no way vindictive; Benson

HOUSE OF THE RESURRECTION, MIRFIELD

not creeping in, under the shadow of a wall, sobbing as the old cords break, but excited, eager, jubilant, enjoying."

His room was piled with books and papers; he used to rush into meals with the glow of suspended energy, eat rapidly and with appetite—I have never seen a human being who ate so fast and with so little preference as to the nature of what he ate—then he would sit absorbed for a moment, and ask to be excused, using the old childish formula: "May I get down?" Sometimes he would come speeding out of his room, to read aloud a passage he had written to my mother, or to play a few chords on the piano. He would not, as a rule, join in games or walks—he went out for a short, rapid walk by himself, a little measured round, and flew back to his work. He generally, I should think, worked about ten hours a day at this time. In the evening he would play a game of cards after dinner, and would sit talking in the smoking-room, rapidly consuming cigarettes and flicking the ash off with his forefinger. He was also, I remember, very argumentative. He said once of himself that he was perpetually quarrelling with his best friends. He was a most experienced coat-trailer! My mother, my sister, my brother, Miss Lucy Tait, who lives with us, and myself would find ourselves engaged in heated arguments, the disputants breathing quickly, muttering unheeded phrases, seeking in vain for a loophole or a pause. It generally ended by Hugh saying with mournful pathos that he could not understand why everyone set on him—that he never argued in any other circle, and he could only entreat to be let alone. It is true that we were accustomed to argue questions of every kind with tenacity and even with invective. But the fact that these particular arguments always dealt with the inconsistencies and difficulties of ecclesiastical institutions revealed their origin. The fact was that at this time Hugh was accustomed to assert with much emphasis some extremely provocative and controversial positions. He was markedly scornful of Anglican faults and mannerisms, and behaved both then and later as if no Anglicans could have any real and vital belief in their principles, but as if they must be secretly ashamed of them. It used to remind

stayed at the home of one of them; and he in his turn made a brief sojourn at Hare Street. But to be frank, Benson had been uprooted, and after transplantation he was not destined to find any of the old soil clinging about him.

me of the priest in one of Stevenson's books, who said to Stevenson: "Your sect—for it would be doing it too much honour to call it a religion," and was then pained to be thought discourteous or inconsiderate.

Discourteous, indeed, Hugh was not. I have known few people who could argue so fiercely without personal innuendo. But, on the other hand, he was both triumphant and sarcastic.

Here is another extract from my diary at this time:

"*August*, 1903.—At dinner Hugh and I fell into a fierce argument, which became painful, mainly, I think, because of Hugh's vehemence and what I can only call violence. He reiterates his consciousness of his own stupidity in an irritating way. The point was this. He maintained that it was uncharitable to say, 'What a bad sermon So-and-so preached!' and not uncharitable to say, 'Well, it is better than the sickening stuff one generally hears;' uncharitable to say, 'What nasty soup this is!' and not uncharitable to say, 'Well, it is better than the filthy pigwash generally called soup.' I maintained that to say that, one must have particular soups in one's mind; and that it was abusing more sermons and soups, and abusing them more severely than if one found fault with one soup or one sermon.

"But it was all no use. He was very impatient if one joined issue at any point, and said that he was interrupted. He dragged all sorts of red herrings over the course, the opinions of Roman theologians, and differences between mortal and venial sin, &c. I don't think he even tried to apprehend my point of view, but went off into a long rigmarole about distinguishing between the sin and the sinner; and said that it was the sin one ought to blame, not the sinner. I maintained that the consent of the sinner's will was of the essence of the sin, and that the consent of the will of the sinner to what was not in itself wrong was the essence of sin—*e.g.* not sinful to drink a glass of wine, but sinful if you had already had enough.

"It was rather disagreeable; but I got so used to arguing with absolute frankness with people at Eton that I forget how disagreeable it may sound to hearers—but it all subsided very quickly, like a boiling pot."

Hugh spent his time "working furiously" at the novel which was afterwards to become *By What Authority?*

I shall speak of it below. It was his *Essay on Development.*[1]

Like Newman, who at Littlemore stood for hour after hour at his desk, groaning and weeping, pouring out, for all men to read, his interpretation of history which had taught him to find living Christianity in Rome, because in Rome alone was to be found that force which, in change, preserved identity of life, so Benson feverishly and in a fashion proper to his personifying temperament, traced the course of his own Romeward soul, exulting, even in this hour of spiritual weariness, in his creative cerebral activity, and he saw that what he made was good.

His brother, Mr. Arthur Benson, writes that he worked at his novel "with inconceivable energy. His absorption in the work was extraordinary. He was reading historical books and any books bearing on the history of the period, taking notes, transcribing. I have before me a large folio sheet of paper on which he has written very minutely hundreds of picturesque words and phrases of the time, to be worked into the book.

For a break, Benson went off upon a lonely bicycle tour, dressed in lay clothes. To Father G. W. Hart he wrote on July 17, 1903:

> . . . My sister has been ill; and there are two female friends of hers in the house now, with whom I eat my meals. Depressing work!
>
> I have just been a four days' bicycle tour, and have returned a rich mahogany colour. At Rye, I *believe*, I had supper with either Forbes Robertson or his twin brother. *Such* a nice man. We talked about the Papists, of novelists, &c., &c.
>
> Your hymn looks charming. I wish it wasn't in A. It is a sealed book to me—that key. *And* I wish you

[1] *By What Authority?* is described below, p. 353 *sqq.*

had put B instead of G♯ the last note but one. But the tune is *excellent.*

His tour had taken him first to Parkminster, the famous Charterhouse in Sussex. He was armed with an introduction from Father Richards to a convert clergyman who was a monk there; but found himself regarded as a probably complacent critic, and retired chilled, and anyhow clear that Parkminster, despite its ominous name, St. Hugh's, was not to be the place he should choose for that fateful retreat he descried not distant from him. He stayed a Sunday at Chichester, confessed, was absolved and told to "cheer up" by the clergyman to whom he avowed that almost certainly his goal was Rome, and for the last time attended a Cathedral service [1] and received the Anglican Holy Communion. He bicycled home after his passing through Lewes and Rye, by way of Mayfield. At the ancient convent walls he gazed with "gnawing envy," and prayed, for a moment's peace, in the village Catholic Church.[2]

In the same letter he says:

To-morrow I go to Lambeth for a few days, to discourse with the Archbishop, among other things, on MY ecclesiastical views. I am going to see Trevelyan and Lord Halifax also. But I fear, I fear. . . .

And to another correspondent he was writing:

Let me tell you that I am seriously upset in my mind about the Church of Rome and the Church of England. It is a dreary old story, I am afraid; but, dreary or not, I am one of the characters in it now. Again, don't be

[1] He had once laughed at Cathedral services to Mrs. Benson, but in his heart he loved them.

[2] Mayfield Convent of the Holy Child consists in part of the ruins of the old Palace of the Archbishops. The three magnificent arches of the Great Hall are embedded in the architecture of the nuns' chapel.

alarmed, I am not going to put my arguments before you. They are very long and elaborate, and have been gathering like a thunderstorm for about a year and a half, and now a crash seems close. However, one never knows. I only mention it "because you are my friend."

Of his visit to Mr. Trevelyan he speaks in his *Confessions*, p. 118. There this clergyman made use of exactly the argument which Benson had used against Father Richards. "How," he had put it, "can there be a sacramental revival where there are no sacraments?" Now the argument had ceased to "appeal" to him, and he said, in fact, that it was not cogent. It was "natural," he saw, that a revival should move along lines indicated by the Prayer Book: God gave greater grace where there was greater zeal; it still was not proved, however, that the mode of seeking it was sanctioned by Him.

His stay at Lambeth was one naturally which demanded extreme forbearance, tact, and intuition. Probably there was here a conflict of two temperaments, as well as of two theories of religion in ultimate essence disparate. Benson in his *Confessions* says that the Archbishop was profoundly surprised that he could submit to a Church whose methods of worship were in certain departments or details distasteful to him. Benson urged that, if he went to Rome, he should go as a child; having persuaded himself that there God's voice was speaking, he would not quarrel with its formulas, still less with its message, not even with its accent. Whether or no the Archbishop, as Benson felt, regarded this readiness for intellectual submission as immoral, he did not disguise from his guest that he felt, as lodged in himself or in the Church at large, no supreme and final authority able and obliged to impose a dogma finally revealed by

Christ. Temperament and taste legislated in the ultimate court.

As a matter of fact, Hugh, though he respected persons whose character claimed respect, had no reverence at any time, I expect, for personages. The vision of Hugh as his father's train-bearer is a charming one; but he had never been, as his brother's *curiosa felicitas* will have it, one of the Nethinim of the sanctuary.

The Archbishop confessedly found Hugh Benson intractable, and wrote telling Lord Halifax so. Benson went therefore immediately to Hickleton, Lord Halifax's house near Doncaster, and stayed there a little over a week, including, I gather, two Sundays, on which he still communicated with his host. There never had been a time when Lord Halifax was anything but utterly sympathetic and affectionate towards Hugh. The friendship persisted absolutely undamaged by the most searching cause of separation that human life admits. "Hugh was," Lord Halifax wrote to me, after Benson's death, "a very dear friend of mine, and I think one of the very most delightful companions it was possible to acquire. One may be very fond of many people, whose deaths don't leave a sense of life being poorer; but Hugh Benson's death—at least I feel it so—takes something away which leaves a particular blank no one else can fill. . . . Somehow I cannot fancy him as ever growing old, and perhaps his death, coming as it did and when it did, put the seal on all that was so delightful and unique in him."

Mr. Trevelyan had directed Benson's eye to the spiritual energy discernible within the Church of England, a phenomenon he was in no way concerned to deny; the Archbishop, starting from premises which were not Hugh's, ended naturally in an ideal and scheme of duty

which could even less be his. Lord Halifax's position, that the Pope's office, evolved by the force of circumstances in the Church, was imposed at most *de iure ecclesiastico*, not *de iure divino*, could fairly be set down in opposition to Benson's. On this the discussion focused; and Lord Halifax's strongest practical argument was the satisfaction expressed by Father Tyrrell and others like him, that men could stay and work "where you and I are," in view of wider, super-personal, and national issues which individual submission could but confuse. He used also an argument advanced by Father Waggett of the Society of St. John the Evangelist in connection with the apparently conflicting claims of religion and science, and urged that it was possible simultaneously to follow for a while lines of knowledge apparently divorced, though tempted to sacrifice one of the two for the sake of immediate consistency. No; he suggested: there were discontinuities in knowledge, temporary at least. Suffer them to be so for the time. Keep close to the salient facts, and trust the future. Harmonisation would not fail to come, though late.

But though Lord Halifax could take from Benson much of the dreary drag involved in dealing with adversaries who cannot begin to understand a position not their own, and though Hugh was bright and at ease, talked happily at table, and succeeded in making long excursions, in which the Bishop of Worcester (Dr. Gore) was a partner, without alluding even once to the cause of his stay, of which the Bishop certainly was aware, Lord Halifax wrote, when Hugh left Hickleton, that he was a "hopeless case," and must be allowed to go.

To Hugh himself he wrote with great pathos on August 25, 1903:

I think God has work to be done by us in the position

in which we find ourselves, work most important in the interests of Christendom, and that you will be leaving this work, and making it more difficult for others—perhaps I should say depriving them of *the help* which such an one as you would so pre-eminently be in bringing people to the truth, and helping to undo some of the things done in the sixteenth century. . . .

For the last time Hugh returned home as an Anglican, still in the same state of spiritual exhaustion. But it was for a few days only. I think he used no more the little chapel of which his mother had written exactly a year ago: "The whole place is so full of you that it is quite comforting to me."[1]

To Miss Kyle he had written on July 29:

I do certainly think that it will end in going; but it has not done so yet; and I am not absolutely certain. . . .

I cannot imagine why our Lord is giving me these particular months of uncertainty. It seems to me inexplicable. But of course He knows. . . .

And on August 27 he adds:

I am so bewildered that it is like a kind of cautery on all sensation. I am reading hard some papers a friend has sent me [these were from Lord Halifax]. But I *believe* I shall go very soon.

A little earlier he wrote to Father G. W. Hart, who was to leave London for South Africa on September 19th:

Here things go along. Divine weather. I work furiously about six hours a day at the very least, and ride a bicycle for a couple of hours each afternoon.

[1] This was the oratory which, as I said, with its adjoining rooms, figured in *The Light Invisible*. It was here, too, that he painted (in water-colours) on the windows tiers upon tiers of Saints. "They were far more visible," Mr. A. C. Benson tells us, "from outside than from within," and their fantastic silhouettes won for them the name, among the villagers, of "Mrs. Benson's dolls." Hugh was thoroughly pleased with them at first, but afterwards effaced them. He returned, however, to the chapel later on; Mass was celebrated there, and the whole place is still, if you choose, "full of Hugh."

People are staying here a lot.

I haven't the faintest idea of where I shall be September 12–19. But if I am in London, by Gad, I will let you know. But even then I too may be starting for Rome! *Quien sabe?*

However, by September 2, his correspondence with Father Richards enables him to tell his penitent that he has almost fixed upon a Dominican house for the retreat which is now clear before him. But he makes it plain to her they must not meet, nor will he hear her confession. "Please agree interiorly with me on those points."

Hugh Benson was involved in one correspondence, and one only, involving real bitterness and conflict of two souls which should have been at peace with one another. Dr. Wordsworth, the late Bishop of Salisbury, a very old friend of Hugh's father, has left a name so rightly venerated for learning and for virtue that it would be preferable in many ways to omit any allusion to his letters at this crisis. Nothing could be further from my wish than to depreciate a noble memory. Still, the interchange of these letters lashed Hugh's nerves to frenzy, and this element in his experiences ought not quite to be omitted.

Writing from Pontresina on August 18, the Bishop surmised that Hugh was looking to the Roman Church in hopes for a richer Christian life, not through doubt of salvation in the English. However, the Bishop considers that—

the untruthfulness of the papal system has gone so deep into the whole religious life of Roman Catholics, even of good men, that it would be vain to seek a higher or so high a life among them, as that which is being led by many, more quietly perhaps, in the English Church. I judge this from the case of an old pupil of mine, one of

the sweetest natures I ever knew, who visibly deteriorated when he became a Jesuit. . . .

He then discusses the Petrine texts on the old Victorian lines, showing the customary misconception of Catholic theology. Writing with extraordinary fidelity to the rules of the controversy proper to a period now for ever passed, he exhorted Hugh to travel before he formed opinions about Rome; he detected in the homage to the Madonna and the Saints, and in the "grave deflection of the Eucharist from its proper purpose," "concessions to heathen instincts within the Church." "Christianity went that way only in pursuit of secular supremacy." "These," says the Bishop most pathetically, having described a mentality supremely different in structure and process from Hugh's, "are some of the thoughts uppermost in my mind, when I try to imagine the reasons which may attract men of intelligence to accept Roman claims."

On the 26th he wrote with, at first, far more insight as follows:

Aug. 26, 1902.

. . . It seems to me that you have been called to be a teacher and a guide of others too soon in your life, before you had settled the nature and grounds of your own belief. Am I wrong in thinking that the process of your mind is now somewhat as follows?

"I feel bound to be a Christian. All my experiences point in that direction. I want also to be a teacher and preacher. That seems my vocation and my 'talent' upon which I shall have to give an account. But there are many things which puzzle and perplex and even repel me in Christianity. Nothing but authority can make them acceptable to me. I want to live without mental struggle and do my work easily. The authority of the Papacy, which is at any rate an ancient and a widespread fact of Christian history, seems what I need."

Then secondly: "It is true that the papal claims are to a great extent of slow development. But development

is a fact of which we have much experience in other fields of God's world. Analogy shows that higher forms grow out of lower, and what remains of lower stages of existence remain in higher stages. These analogies explain the defects—as they seem from the outside—of the Papacy."

The Bishop proceeds to argue:

I see no personal recognition of the personality of Christ in your life. "Atonement," for instance, you take on authority:—that is no use: you haven't realised St. Paul's "accepted in the Beloved," "holding the Head," &c.

He discusses, too, the nature of Hell; the authority, again, of the Papacy, in which he sees the submission of the clergy to be due to "seminary atmosphere," while the multiplicity of English sects is but a mark of exuberance of life. "Analogy," he concludes, "will not hold in the case of development."

Hugh answers with what the Bishop feels to be "tender patience": he is much touched, but rapidly hastens towards rebuke.

Benson contemplates, he cries out, an act of "moral and spiritual suicide," and will inflict a deep wound on the Anglican Church. "Your father's and your mother's son should not do this. Where should respect for Church authority come to you except in connection with their teaching and example?"

He is glad, indeed, to hear that Hugh has personal devotion to Christ. Still, Papalism is "Christianity without Christ." "It seems to me simply miserable," he cries, "that a young Englishman, called to win souls to the truth, should abdicate responsibility for his own soul in order to escape the trial which exercise of faith involves." The Papacy is a "strange creation in which policy, arrogance, superstition, falsehood, force, fraud, secular ambition, and

love of money have worked together since about A.D. 200, the time of Pope Victor, to enthrall mankind;" and he alludes to the "falsehoods" of "respectable men" like Innocent I, and theologians like Leo I. He enlightens him on the trading propensities of French religious; the Concordat was "an instrument by which (originally) King and Pope divided the rights of the Church between them, and prevented the Church of France, from the reign of François I onwards, from becoming the real power in the State and exercising its proper influence as a body corporate." "Heaven forbid that anyone of your name and family should help to re-establish a similar alien domination in England." . . . "Rome is far more than you think a money-making institution. The Papacy exists to supply salaries to the Cardinals, and places to an army of hangers-on." If the Concordat were terminated, Papal coffers would empty: it must therefore be preserved at all costs. . . .

My dear boy, what you need is to cease dreaming, and to become a humble servant of the poor in some well-[managed parish[1]]—not too hopelessly undermanned—where your spirit would find rest in really growing like Christ in daily tasks.

Once more he wrote, hoping that Hugh would return to the Church of England safe and sound; else, he would lose his Christian faith altogether, or, possibly, become a "hardened" Romanist. Hugh destroyed this last letter, though the rest survive. In them we see the revelation of a tender and yearning mind wasting its passionate affections over an illusion; living in a present and forecasting a future, with regard to the Roman Catholic life, after a fashion conceivable by a Catholic only with the

[1] I think this is right. The Bishop was writing in the train.

most violent imaginative effort. At least it will serve the Catholic for a lesson of the all but infinite difficulty involved in his appreciating the Protestant mind, when he sees how a man of immense learning, profound piety, utter sincerity and deep personal affection, can so misconceive the Catholic mentality.

I cannot refrain from quoting these lines of a letter from Mrs. Benson to Hugh, dated September 17th :

"These days [the Bishop of Salisbury had written to Mrs. Benson] have been days of acute misery to me." He is really suffering very much, and his love of your father and the Church of England is very strong, and works in him till he can scarcely bear it. . . . [He had not expected the change was so imminent.] He has got a big old heart at bottom.

Hugh really had no difficulty in appreciating what his insight, no less than his mother's, at once laid hold of. There was never, in him, the least spark of vindictiveness.

The prayers which Hugh had asked "for one tempted to secede" had been offered, however, not in vain. On September 7th he left Tremans, in lay clothes once again, for the Dominican Priory at Woodchester, where Father Reginald Buckler, O.P., was awaiting him. Every stage in this last journey his mother watched in tireless thought. Each day, almost, a letter follows him.

On September 8th she was writing :

September 8.

Since I saw the diminishing snake curve under the bridge, in everything but in physical sight you have been, so to say, nearer than ever ; at 6, I pictured the "wait for 'bus'"—about 6.30 your arrival—the evening offices (blessed)—at 11, when I was going to bed, I hoped for you asleep, in order to be ready for very early morning—and now (11.30 A.M.) I think of you either admiring the superb view, or talking as S. Francis over the door to S. Dominic

—and the blessing of God over all. . . . I am hungering for to-morrow to hear from you "the programme" as you said, because I want to tell the household about it before the rumours from outside reach them, and because I want—O HOW MUCH—to have a touch from you. Beth's dearest love.

His elder brother, too, wished him a generous God-speed:

I say with all my heart that, knowing what you feel, I couldn't wish you to act otherwise, and I will add God bless and prosper you!

With the pleasantest Cotswold scenery Hugh Benson found himself enraptured.

"This," he writes to India on September 10th, "is the most astonishing country—among the Cotswolds. It is a sort of Scotland—high hills—running streams—and really *steep* hills and valleys. I want to live here permanently."

Elsewhere he says he found it "like some parts of Italy"; and to Miss Kyle he gaily says, "This is a beautiful house in a beautiful country, and contains some beautiful people."[1]

This transfiguration affected only what he reached with that part of his soul which he named external. Within, he sat utterly still, numbed, contemplating this romantic outside world, and himself enjoying it as in a picture. The Stroud omnibus carried him along with it, seemingly motionless, like a spectator faced by the moving scenery in *Parsifal*. He listened to a rosy-faced old man talking; he watched some children who were troublesome. . . .

[1] "All that country," he wrote (*Spiritual Letters*, p. 18) "is bound up with my own happiness in my mind; the great hills and valleys, and the miles of tableland at the top—like the top of prayer: monotonous, with sensational approaches, but high up."

Down the path from the Priory a lay-brother came to meet the omnibus, and with him Hugh climbed to the gates of the church where, almost as in allegory, Father Reginald Buckler was waiting for him. It is hard to write as one would about this priest, who unlocked the greater gates for Hugh Benson, and left with him a memory of affection undoubtedly unique in his kind. Perhaps you will remember a novel by one whom Benson loved, *The Cardinal's Snuff-box*, and something of what Peter felt to proceed from the old churchman's mere presence in the house. "Nor knowest thou," he quoted, "what argument thy life to thy neighbour's creed hath lent." Father Buckler was not the "original" of that Cardinal; but something of the courtesy, tact, and gentle worldly wisdom coupled with true interior spirituality of Udeschini was in the Dominican. And I would dare to say that it may well be that in him, and in him alone since his days at Kemsing, he found something of an atmosphere which had a unique charm for him. There is a delicate and vanishing aroma which haunts old-fashioned drawing-rooms, and there is a grave sweetness of thought and quaint stateliness of language belonging to an age dubbed Victorian mostly in derision. Few of its gracious ladies and courteous masterful old men are now with us, but it is a privilege at least to recollect what we can never reproduce. Not that I assert for a moment that these qualities were, so to say, textually reproduced in Father Buckler's welcome; but they had their spiritual and, yes, even their exterior analogies, and a perfectly distinct atmosphere and colour belongs to all this episode. Not that Hugh sentimentalised over it more than over any other part of his life. The Prior, he finds, is "quite fascinating, with an intense sense of humour, which greatly relieves the situation." Father Buckler,

owing possibly to his radical simplicity, is "just the least apt to classify too quickly, and to take silence for consent.[1] I wasted a day or two through not realising that." To another, he writes too of a priest "like a white-haired mouse dressed in flannel—very little and pious and old." To him he relates how Father Buckler is organist; he consults Hugh's tastes; does he like the tunes? shall he play a little Bach or Handel to-night, for a change? And would he like to see his sketches? Besides this, the instructor took his disciple for long walks through the romantic countryside, and was sincerely distressed that he could not induce him to provide him with some difficulty to explain. . . . He gave him the Catechism; he begged for questions; he tried to raise the ghost of Indulgences—surely *they* must scare him? Not in the least: Hugh wasn't clear he understood the last word about them, but he believed them quite without anxiety. . . . However, the eager Dominican was given his chance, and expounded Indulgences at satisfactory full length. . . .

To him Hugh showed the typed copy of *A City set on a Hill*, and the priest told him there was nothing left but for him to kiss St. Peter's Chair.[2]

What Hugh needed most of all was just that amount of prayer which should keep his tired soul alive without demanding from it any exercise. He was to rest: even the supreme operation Father Buckler was resolved upon performing must be performed without added shock. Hugh was his own anæsthetic: he was unconscious even of joy. He heard Mass; was at the day offices now

[1] Many mistakes would have been saved had Hugh Benson's interviewers been more careful to remember that the extreme politeness which prompted his silences did not necessarily in the least indicate assent.

[2] This booklet, published by the C.T.S., contains his favourite arguments for Catholicism and which need no re-statement.

and then, and always at Compline, of which the Dominican *Salve Regina* was the only luminous place in a spiritually grey day.

Immediately upon his arrival he wrote to his mother and explained that he would not be baptized, even conditionally, owing to the absolute certainty that his Anglican baptism had been valid in form and intention, which, given the Archbishop's knowledge of liturgy and his constant practice, could scarcely have been otherwise.[1] Hugh also mentions the possibility of his receiving tonsure and possibly "minor orders" directly after his reception. He would then be able to wear his "customary clerical clothes," though in the case of his singularly straightforward mind I think the "humiliation" which strikes so many convert clergymen with downright panic — of reverting to lay costume—would have seemed singularly unimpressive.

On September 10th Mrs. Benson answered :

TREMANS, *September* 10.

MY DEAREST,—Your letter this morning is a wonderful comfort, and you can understand how hungry and thirsty we are for every smallest detail. I read every word to Beth immediately after prayers, and though her face broke up now and then, she beamed at the end, and is now deep in the mysteries of the difference between celluloid collars and linen ones—and I can't unravel that either. . . . I am deeply thankful as to your not being re-baptized. . . . It all sounds very straight and simple—which is just what one wants—and it is so good that

[1] The Catholic practice of conditional baptism of converts is a very frequent cause of unnecessary disturbance to non-Catholic onlookers. When the convert has certainly been baptized, or certainly not, the Church uses no further baptismal ceremony, or baptizes outright. When the Anglican baptism has been doubtfully administered—and even now, only experience can show how often this is so—the Church baptizes *sub conditione*. There never is, nor in the nature of things can be, *re*-baptism. Conditional baptism means, If you have never been baptized, this is baptism. If you have, it is nothing at all.

there is no pressing or urging — only putting things before you to see exactly what it means and whether you can accept all. You will let me know AT ONCE, I know, when you are actually received, or if you CAN, *before*, so that my heart—our hearts—may be specially with you—I shall just wait from day to day. I intend to tell the household as soon as I hear from you for certain—as I should like them to know from within first. Without, [people] will not be pre-eminently sympathetic. And I *am* glad about the "minor orders"; it will be a comfort to you to show in your dress exactly what you are, and not to seem like a layman—it will be far wisest all round.

Dearest, your words surround my heart with infinite warmth—it has been just what I so earnestly desired—how, loving you as I do, could I do anything else?—indeed, as you know, we all three were entirely of one mind, and if you found it, as you did, God bless you, the atmosphere that helped your soul, why, what blessing and thankfulness from all our hearts to God! You have been so preciously sweet in these months and so eager to do all I asked.

Next day she wrote again:

September 11.

. . . I am not sorry there are no delays—I am so glad there is no re-baptism—and I think the tonsure and the minor orders would be a comfort in a way . . . do come back soon.

I told the household to-day, that they might know the exact time.

And at 5 o'clock to-day how specially we shall be with you, my Dearest.

Only keep us posted in *every possible detail* all so dear to our hearts. And God's blessing, wide, deep and high be on you, and God's love full, rich and large, compass you round.

But on the evening of that day, at 6.30 in the evening, Father Buckler heard Hugh's confession in the Woodchester Chapter-house, and gave him the kiss of peace, saying, "I shall have to call you in future 'My dear Hugh.'" Hugh loved this fatherliness, and alludes to it

in letters, always with the corollary, "He is a *dear* old man!"

To his mother Hugh wrote briefly that "it had happened." She answered at once:

MY DEAREST SON,—I have your note to say "it has happened," and it was sweet to me to think your first action on coming was to write this, and O how I wish you could transport your dear self here—we know you are ours still, and nothing will ever shake that fundamental blessed reality of love. For the rest, you are now where your heart feels you can be truly loyal, where it finds its home, where you deeply feel God has led you. We trust you to Him in utter love and boundless hope. . . . Only *let us in*, always, wherever you rightly can—be as you have always been. . . . Letters are showering in . . . how superficial some are, and how Extraordinarily people are ready to think you have overlooked some momentous fact lying close at hand, and that they will kindly draw attention to it.

On the same day Miss Lucy Tait, the devoted friend of Hugh's family, also wrote to him:

September 12, 1903.

It has been such a comfort that all these last weeks we have been all so knit up together. It seems as if the inner bond had got so much closer as the outer one has—what shall I say—changed?

On the day after his reconciliation he received Holy Communion from the hands of the Prior. Father McNabb has written to me that:

During these days at Woodchester no great fuss was made about him. He was left a good deal to himself. He was extraordinarily untiring with his pen. Every spare moment was given to writing. I believe he was then seeing through the press *By What Authority*. He was also putting together *A City set on a Hill*.

His sense of humour was extremely alert. Good stories found him a good listener, and were usually re-

peated "in kind." The stammer which was quite noticeable in ordinary talk never dulled the point of his stories.

There was a childlike obedience about him which struck me as being not a natural gift, but a hard-won acquisition. It was a noble second-childhood, which spoke of victory won.

The weariness which he speaks of in his own account of conversion was only just noticeable. I remember taking it to be the aftermath of some years at one of our great Universities. It was but a full-grown Englishman's portion of that self-control which has become a proverb beyond these islands. [. . . .]

Within his soul lurked the elements of a tragedy. If in the end he died the death, as he had lived the life, of an apostle, it was no doubt due to the years of self-control which not everyone recognised in the untiring writer and preacher. Many of the souls to whom his character appealed by its energy and vivid colouring did not perhaps realise that elsewhere, in overlooked regions of his being, lay his strength. Indeed some of those points of character that made most friends were perhaps counted by his Judge amongst the dangers of his soul. *In silentio et in spe.* Certain habits of thought and action, of humility in mind and deed, outbalanced the gifts that some men praised most.

On the Monday he left Woodchester for Talacre, after a four days' stay only. His experiences read as if it had been four weeks. "You will be sorry to leave that peaceful place and the dear little man," his mother wrote. "But life goes on and work, and these dear havens, like our three months together, are like the Arbour for Pilgrims, I suppose, for refreshment, and not for remaining." At Talacre, Father Richards, acting there as chaplain to Sir Piers and Lady Mostyn, was awaiting him. Dreams added glamour to his going; he "recognised" his new surroundings, and felt, half-pathetically, half-whimsically, that indeed he was coming home.

He remained quietly at Talacre for some time, and

visited the Jesuit house of theology at St. Beuno's, the Capuchin novitiate at Pantasaph, and St. Winifred's Well at Holywell hard by.[1] Above all, he was speculating on and arranging for his future career. At first it is the Dominican idea which recurs oftenest in his letters. It is an open secret that he at first wished to enter that Order, and I am allowed to say that he actually offered himself for acceptance as a novice. The Dominican fathers, however, with genuine disinterestedness, would not permit any such rapid step, though that he was destined for the priesthood was clear.

"I have nothing more," he wrote on September 23, 1903, to Mr. A. C. Benson from Talacre, "than the deepest possible conviction—no emotionalism or sense of relief, or anything of that kind. All the first week I was with the Dominicans—who, I imagine, will be my final destination after two or three years. . . .

"I imagine I shall begin to read theology again, in view of future ordination." This would take him either to Rome in November, or to Prior Park, near Bath, where he could teach as well as read.

Mamma and I are meeting in London next week. She really has been good to me beyond all words. Her patience and kindness have been unimaginable.

Well—this is a dreary and egotistical letter. But you asked me to write about myself.

Well—I must thank you again for your extreme kindness—I really am grateful, though I am always dumb about such things when I meet people.

[1] At Holywell he had a disconcerting experience. The place was crowded with pilgrims when he, in his grey suit and bowler hat, arrived escorted by Father Richards. The priest in charge of the well, knowing Father Richards and his interest in converts, shouted a welcome to him (for he could not reach him), and asked if he had seen the conversion of Benson, announced that day. Hugh remained serene, and afterwards went to tea at the presbytery.

Father Reginald Buckler followed up his kind offices with wise and leisurely advice, supremely in keeping with Hugh's own tendency of life:

Sept. 21.

Do not, my dear fellow, have any misgivings as to your vocation to the priesthood—I firmly believe in it. Your love for the priestly office, and for Divine things, and your aptitude for the work all point to it.

Benson had some £50 a year, and could therefore go to Rome in sufficient independence; and in view of his possible departure thither, Father Buckler introduced him to Father Paul MacKay, O.P., who had long been resident there. The important point was to get ordained before entering an order.

"I am fond of the sentence," Father Buckler wrote on October 22, when his departure seemed still unsettled, "'Let us leave room for Providence to work.' If your going to Rome be delayed, I take it that there are souls in England waiting for your help to their conversion, and that if you had been away, you would have missed them. . . . In any case, cultivate the 'courageous soul,' and take the little checks as trials of the spirit, and ride straight over them—transcend them, to use a nice old patristic word. How soon a few years go by!"

He repeated much the same advice after Hugh had left England:

Nov. 16, 1903.

No doubt I often said that we must "leave room for Providence to work." You will feel, I am sure, that your present position and work at Cambridge is all part of the spiritual scheme. "Deus est agens principale" is another splendid principle. Let God work and arrange for me. The Divine Element is stronger than the human, in the Church, although the human is, and has been, and always must be, so strong.

> "Each in his hidden sphere of bliss or woe
> Our hermit spirits dwell."

Those two verses (that contain these lines) are to me quite perfect, and none that Keble ever wrote seem to

compare with them. They are the first two for the twenty-fourth Sunday after Trinity.[1]

On September 17 Mrs. Benson wrote:

. . . Your letter just come from Talacre—and so greedily read. You are so good, dearest, and you certainly *are* the same R. H. B.—only I want to see you dreadfully. O Hugh! What a strange new circle you are entering on! You must give them all to me. That is just my heart's desire—the old circle which we go on in, you know well—but Pantasaph and St. Beuno's, and St. Winifred's Well, and Talacre and Erdington Abbey and the Mostyns—these, and all they mean, you must make me understand and know.

A gracious and statesmanlike letter reached him from the Archbishop. After expressing his natural regret at the step taken by Hugh, he added affectionately:

Sept. 16, 1903.

. . . I retain, however, the opinion I expressed to you, that it would have been wrong on your part to have allowed reverence for [your father's] memory to pull you into what would have been a dishonest act or series of acts on your part, your convictions being what they now

[1] It is pleasant to know that the relations between the spiritual father and the son remained intact. Father Benson revisited Woodchester and his old friend almost at once after his return from Rome; on which occasion he obstinately refused to preach to those who had been his teachers. He took a short holiday once with Father Buckler, and taking him to see over Lambeth, found the Archbishop absent, but Mrs. Benson unexpectedly there. Father Buckler never forgot, and was profoundly touched by the kindness of Hugh's mother, who, as she took his hands into hers, looked into the eyes of the priest who had put her son "where he longed to be," and said, "I never forget September 11th." Hugh used to send him the handbills of his sermons, and dedicated the *Confessions* to him. Father Buckler sent him in return his *Spiritual Journal*, for refreshment in wearied moments. Benson never forgot, and wrote not unfrequently to, this untiring labourer in Christ's vineyard, even in British Grenada, whither obedience was to send him. The simple, gentle priest, high-bred none the less, and quoting Horace, full of a brisk, pious humour too, in the treatment of clinging converts, was a genuine loss to Hugh. The last piece of his advice I find is that he should read Newman's *Loss and Gain*, especially the earlier pages, for an intimate knowledge of the hearts of boys, and of young men.

are. I am quite sure that when the choice lies between a non-natural use of words upon which so much depends and a change of faith, it is an honest man's duty to make the change rather than to practise what to me at least seems to be a course of deliberate evasion or deceit.

Very little but kind wishes followed him even from those who felt his loss most keenly. Dr. Eden, the Bishop of Wakefield, wrote most sorrowfully, but with tenderest affection, assuring him of its continuance and begging that no bitterness might henceforward alter Hugh's kindliness of heart towards the Church he had left.

Father Frere, writing from the troubled atmosphere of St. Michael's, Shoreditch, said :

Sept. 13, 1903.

Writing *here*, I am more grateful than ever for the *manner* of it and for all your great consideration and goodness in doing what was so difficult to all concerned ; the contrast *here* could hardly have been more marked,[1] and it makes me all the more feel what we all have been spared of bitterness and misunderstanding. I hope the Dominicans will be your home, if it isn't folly of me to say so. It was such a relief to see your address and be able to think of you in hands that one can far better trust than some others. . . . Tell us sometimes how things go on, for there will be many who will want to know, and for whom many old ties of love and common work and worship will never be broken.

On his side Father Bickersteth, with more than one *pointe de malice*, broke the news "gently" to forty ladies to whom he was giving a retreat. They were mildly shocked, but felt sure that to follow conscience was the best. For *The Light Invisible*, destined to be read at table, he rather slyly substituted Paget's *Spirit of Discipline*. "Is it unfair," he asks, "to tell people as I do that you were trained by Dr. Vaughan, and that you came to Mirfield

[1] The allusion here visible reflects the contemporary misunderstanding of the recent conversions so sensationally accomplished at St. Michael's,

with certain tendencies which we were able to restrain but not eradicate? . . . I hope you are not wearing a red tie."

The Bishop of Worcester wrote:

BISHOP'S HOUSE, WORCESTER,
Sept. 21, 1903.

MY DEAR HUGH,—God bless you. May it all turn out for the best for all of us.—Yours affectionately,

C. WIGORN.

I cannot put "Esq.," and you wouldn't wish for "Rev." Therefore nothing.

Shortly before this he had heard from Father Tyrrell. He writes that he is glad, the more sincerely "as I know you are explicitly aware of what seems to me the true state of the question in regard to the nature of Church authority. . . . Either you have seen your way to accept the extreme view of the matter, which may be the right view after all . . . or else Fr. Buckler does not share with me in a scruple which I confess is normally regarded as somewhat over-refined and pedantic." He went on to recall that sacrifice is sweet at first; reaction comes, and need of shut eyes and full trust in "Him who has Himself deceived us if we are deceived, and who must see us through the pass to which He has brought us." . . . He prayed that no tinge of convert fanaticism might mar Hugh's attitude to those he had left; he must never be impatient. Let patronising airs be left as a monopoly to non-Catholics; for Catholics, gentleness of judgment, sympathy with mental difficulties, tolerance of intolerance.

Father E. I. Purbrick wrote to Hugh from Clongowes Wood College, Sallins, Co. Kildare, on September 16th:

Sept. 16, 1903.

This morning I read in the paper of your reception into the Church at Woodchester, and cannot refrain from

congratulating from my heart a son of my dearest old friend, your father. As boys we advanced along the same path towards the Church, and his conversion was my daily prayer until his death. I . . . pray earnestly for the repose of his soul.

Benson answered, and Father Purbrick wrote again, in words which will be valued by many, on September 19 :

. . . You can have no idea how the news rejoiced my heart. Your dear father was my oldest and most valued friend, and my greatest sorrow since I became a Catholic was, as I ever told him, that he and Lightfoot had not received the same inestimable grace. So I rejoice more than I can express that one of his sons is now a fellow-Catholic. . . . You may depend on my daily memento henceforth in the Holy Sacrifice.

I have worked through a great pile of letters from Anglicans, and, to my astonishment, they are nearly all congratulatory. Some deplore the departure, but by no means for dogmatic so much as for reasons connected rather with ecclesiastical politics. Moreover, they are either, in the mass, from clerics, or from quite poor people.

From one correspondent he received the following :

Sept. 19, 1903.

With what joy I learn that to you has been vouchsafed the call to "go up higher"! Whenever this is granted to any of my friends I always say a "Gloria in Excelsis," like Dante's holy souls in Purgatory at a brother's release. To me it has not come yet—or rather God's hand seems still to bar the path I so long to tread. Pray for me that before I die I too may have grace to enter the City of Gladness.

To balance this, he heard from others : how, "if I had not been so great a coward, I should long ago have left the Church of England . . . but outwards, away from all faith."

And constantly the blame for his departure is laid at the door of the Anglican authorities. Moreover, a rather

displeasing tone, as of men pitying "the poor old Church of England," jars not infrequently upon a reader who is fain to see interior affection and respect accompany external loyalty. One clergyman insists that the fault in the Church of England lies with the clergy. People are thirsting for *full* Catholic doctrine; parsons fear to give it out, and use "veiled words": just enough to satisfy their conscience.

Rumour says that you leave the English Church not because you doubt her orders, but because she is so timorous, and so often gives way before Protestant outbreaks.

So, too, the clergyman of a church where Robert Hugh Benson had preached a Mission and a Revival in 1902, wrote on September 18, 1903:

I fear there is sad consternation at W——, and the poor Catholics who have been drawn on will have a rough time of it from their Protestant neighbours and friends.

I grant you things have been very, very trying lately, and episcopal policy has been almost unbearable. But it is no new thing to us older ones, who have had to endure frowns and scoldings continuously; and what we have known has been nothing compared with what the Tractarians suffered.[1]

"Anyhow," the conclusion often is, "it's all very mysterious; so much so, that I can safely stay where I am."

It is sad when men resign themselves to membership of a Church simply because the pros and cons of organised systems of Christianity are so bewildering that they can plead just helplessness to judge as the final motive for loyalty.

[1] A fascinating theme of discussion is suggested here. The atmosphere in which modern conversions take place is so utterly different from that of the bygone world of Newman.

A special interest attaches to a letter from the present Abbot of Caldey; from it I quote a few sentences:

It seems so hard to go on with the men to whom one looks to do great things in the cause of Corporate Reunion dropping off one by one into little reunions of their own. . . . What a joy it must be, to be in Rome as a *Roman*, not as a mere spectator! . . . Do you remember those happy days at Malling when you were "coming on"? What an anti-Roman you were then!

It was with this Abbot of Caldey, who at last has followed a like call, that Hugh took refuge to "make his soul" for the last time, in retreat, not a month before his death.

From his own letters I will quote two extracts. To Mr. Spencer Jones he wrote thanking him cordially for his congratulations, and his sympathetic warning in view of the singular light-heartedness with which Catholics too often seem to accept their privileges:

One is still somewhat bewildered in these new surroundings, but I think I know what you mean about the "apparent flippancy"; but, as you say, it is a mark of fearlessness and security in the possession of them.

It also strikes me how very little people on this side really know of Anglican methods of thought. They see the inconsistencies and weakness of the other side, and so on, but do not seem to realise their real points of view at all. I have been quite astonished in reading some of the controversial books and pamphlets to see how entirely they sometimes miss the target—and do not really even aim at the Catholic party in the Church of England, much less hit them. It does certainly seem that misunderstanding and contempt are responsible for a great deal of needless division.

Next to the saving of his own soul, it does really seem as if the very first duty of an Anglican who has made his submission is to do his best to make people on this side understand a little better the point of view of people on

that. Really, nothing can be gained from drawing caricatures of one's opponents.

It is extremely rash of me to talk like this, of course; but both from your book and your letters I know that you will understand what I mean, and that I can say all this without the danger of your thinking that my submission has not been whole-hearted and unreserved. For, even for controversial purposes, it is better for one to know one's "enemy's" position accurately rather than inaccurately. Your book, I am sure, is of the greatest value, just for the reason that it insists so powerfully on the need of looking at things from other people's point of view, if one is to be of any service to the other people.

To India he had written:

Do write again soon; I can't tell you how much I love to hear. And a letter like the last above all. I know you won't let any "change of religion" mean a change of anything else. It seems to me shocking that it should do that.

Lord Halifax wrote almost in the same words:

HICKLETON, DONCASTER,
Sept. 13, 1903.

MY DEAR HUGH,—It does indeed make no difference as far as I am concerned. Why should it? There is only *one* Church, and, as *I* believe, you have merely changed your opinion as to certain matters on a family quarrel upon which, from any point of view, there is much to be said on both sides, and in regard to which neither side is assuredly blameless. How the matter may present itself to anyone else—or even to you, cannot affect my judgment of the situation, and I do beg you to believe, my very dear friend, that if you are not controversial and unjust—and I cannot conceive of you as either—your hopes and plans, your objects and interests, will be just as much a matter of concern to me as ever they were. God may have a special work for you, and I pray Him to bless you and it with all my heart.

So kind were the letters he received that he would often use the words, "It is a real joy to be written to like that."

For completeness' sake, let me give these extracts from his correspondence with Miss Kyle.

On September 12 he wrote:

I am not writing about feelings, and so on; because, after all, they can never be trusted; and there is no need to write about convictions, even if you cared to hear of them.

And you need not be afraid that I shall bother you with controversy, because personally I believe that that is the longest road to truth, if, indeed, it ever gets there at all.

And again on September 15 from Talacre:

I told my mother I was troubled in mind more than a year ago. Of course it was something of a shock to her, but comparatively slight. Then, as the months went by, I kept her fully informed, so far as was possible, as to my state of mind, and ultimately, when my decision was taken, it was very little shock to her, as the idea had become familiar to her. I also gave her a promise, or rather an understanding, which I distinguished from a promise, that I would not be received without letting her know. The result has been that neither she nor I are conscious of an estrangement [. . .] It is quite possible, I should think, too, always to let them [one's parents] know, as it were, by the way; and not make an announcement of it. People are generally shocked if we let them see we expect it, and not otherwise.

You ask me about my own sensations now. What I *know* is this—that I could have done nothing else; that everything pointed steadily to the event; that the Church of England "was a schoolmaster" . . . and, therefore, that I have a great gratitude and tenderness still, and, please God, always shall have, for her. But that now I have arrived. Right down below there is all this fundamental knowledge and certitude that the See of Peter is the one and only centre of unity. But as for actual feelings, I may frankly say that I have none at all yet, of any sort—scarcely even of "dryness." For the last three months my soul seems to have been completely numbed—no distress and no joy—at least in the spiritual realm—though plenty of *physical* depression and exaltation. Is this very vague? I don't know how else to express it. But I am completely

and wholly certain that this step is not the result of emotions in any sense, but of the coldest sort of conviction. And perhaps God has sent me this odd state, in order that I may act from convictions only, and know it.

And on September 29:

For myself I have never exactly "seen" it; but I have "felt" it as in the dark, and I acted in the dark, knowing, but not perceiving. Now, thank God, after swaying about out of one's depth, one begins to feel the Immovable Rock. Let me tell you that you have (1) Poor Clares, (2) Capuchins, (3) a French convent at Tyburn, all praying for you, so you need fear nothing. However dark and cold you feel, do remember that the Poor Clares alone would be enough to save anyone.

In the negotiations of this period relating to his immediate destination, the name of the late Father Maturin constantly recurs. Father Maturin's life has been sacrificed in atrocious circumstances; in its long record of kindnesses, which, we rejoice to know, the wise and affectionate hand of Mr. Wilfrid Ward will shortly render permanent, few episodes stand out more worthily than the persistent interest he displayed at this time towards this neophyte. Long before, when Benson wrote to him from Damascus, where the news of Maturin's own conversion had just reached him, Maturin had kept silence. Now, his was among the first of the congratulatory telegrams which came to Hugh.

Before October was over, he had met him.

"Yes, indeed," he writes on the 26th to Miss Hilda Buckenham, "Father Maturin is just the same, and his sermons as astonishing as ever. There is really nobody like him for *prodigality* of thought and words. I want to hold out my hand and stop him in the middle, until something has had time to penetrate my thick brain—something that I know is good, but cannot appreciate. And he is so genial and kindly too."

And rather later on:

I wish you could have heard Fr. Maturin's address. It was amazing. He went on like a torrent for one and a quarter hours, and it was all packed with intricate argument and answer and counter-answer. I can't conceive the process of mind by which he does it.

Father Maturin was eager that Hugh should enter the Sulpician seminary in Rome. But it was full, and this rebuff was the first which Benson's sensitive eagerness to begin experienced. However, negotiations with the English Church of San Silvestro followed almost at once. The visit to Erdington Abbey had been successfully accomplished, and of it Dom Bede Camm has written to me:

We were asked to invite him to Erdington, as it was thought some stay in a Catholic monastery would be good, and he came on to us from Woodchester. I can hardly say how much I was delighted with him. His enthusiasm as a Catholic and his humility as a raw convert were equally touching. He then began to consult me on the book he was writing on the Elizabethan persecution. I took him to Oscott, and he was greatly delighted with the treasures preserved there—the old vestments, the chalices, missal, altar-stones, &c., of penal days. He poured out the details of the book, as it was shaping itself, and eagerly seized on any points that would be of use to him. In the end it was settled that I should read and correct the proof-sheets and do my best to help him to secure historical accuracy. But before that I used to get (after he left us) sheets of questions, full of historical puzzles, often beyond my wit to answer.

But since *By What Authority* was not published till later, I will reserve what else Dom Bede can tell about its genesis till I speak more fully of it.

After Erdington he came back, by way of London, to Tremans.

He writes to Mr. A. C. Benson on October 5, 1903:

BARTON ST.

Yesterday I went about a little, and made acquaintance with churches. It was all very queer, but I suppose one will feel comfortable soon. The combination of extreme homeliness and magnificence is very odd, but very striking.

Not long afterwards the date for his departure for Rome was fixed, November 2nd. "I cannot bear the thought of it," he writes to his eldest brother.

PART II

NOVEMBER 1903—JULY 1908

Statuit super petram pedes meos : et direxit gressus meos.
Et immisit in os meum canticum novum : carmen Deo nostro.

Psalm xxxix. 3, 4.

CHAPTER I

IN ROME

NOVEMBER 1903–JUNE 1904

Fecisti patriam diuersis gentibus unam :
Profuit inuitis, te dominante, capi.
Dumque offers uictis proprii consortia iuris,
Urbem fecisti quod prius orbis erat.

RUTILIUS NAMATIANUS.

I

ON the chilly morning of All Souls' Day, 1903, Hugh's mother once more stood at his side to hearten his departure. Upon the London platform an incident took place for which our memory will be always grateful. Immediately on her return Mrs. Benson wrote :

. . . When the last speck of your disgusting train had gone, L. and I went out of the station, and a firm hand grasped my arm. I looked round, and there was the Bishop of St. Andrews ! He had dashed off, on receiving a letter from me telling him you were going this morning, hoping to see you off, but just too late. He was *delightful*, reminding me that if your father, while he was on earth, would have wished you at all costs to follow your conscience, how much more in Paradise, and he said many delightful things of you too. They aren't all S——'s ! . . . Your room here looks fiendish without you. We went into your Cathedral as we came back, and prayed for your safe journey and happy arrival.

Hugh wired his successful crossing, and his mother wrote again on the 4th :

Beth has been going about like a bird with a broken wing, but the telegram has heartened her up, and she

sends her dear love. It is all so very exceedingly FLAT to us all now you are gone, and we must not BE flat. Even the household gives it as its opinion that "the house isn't itself without one of Our Gentlemen." . . . O my son, I want to feel

> "And each one that is gone
> Has left my heart less lonely"[1]

about you too. . . . I have had a real PRIZE of a letter from A. B. about you, which beats X out and out. She apparently hopes you are a little out of your mind. Such a simple way of accounting for it!

On the same day Hugh wrote, illustrating his letter here and there:

SAN SILVESTRO IN CAPITE,
Nov. 4.

Here I am at last. Everything on the journey went off all right; but it *is* a long business, and I have been tearing about all day ever since I arrived this morning.

Nothing at all exciting happened on the way. The Channel was like a M. P.;[2] nobody ill at all anywhere; the chicken at Calais as usual; dinner at Paris as usual.

My cabman beat his horse, and I screamed at him[3] "Assez de fouet" so fiercely that we crawled all the rest of the way. Everybody in Paris was wearing a kind of clerical hat, so they all looked like Low Church clergymen [sketch]. . . . Reached Rome half an hour late this morning. All my luggage turned up; no douane *anywhere* except at Calais, where they opened nothing. All day long Mr. —— has been taking me everywhere to buy clothes. He looks magnificent, in a furry hat and buckled shoes [sketch]. We have the most complete freedom here. We must be in by 10 P.M., and that is the only regulation at all of any kind. One arranges everything for one's self. I went to a coach to-day, Professor Lauri, who is going to coach me for two hours a week, and on Friday I start lectures—two or three a day.

[1] From a Catholic hymn for the departed, by Lady Georgiana Fullerton.

[2] I cannot determine whether Hugh meant a mill-pond, or not.

[3] After he had been shown over a house which he admired immensely, his hostess delightedly wrote to Mrs. Benson, "I have never met anybody who *screamed* so much."

My room here is splendid—I should say 14 feet high, red-tiled floor, two big tables, all other necessary furniture, four chairs, and looks out on to a court, where a fountain splashes, and a sort of high cedar tree comes just above my windows. I made the acquaintance of two cats at lunch, and two parrots after—one kept on saying "Papagoletto"=little parrot.

The clergymen here are very nice—missionaries. They have a house in Africa, and have lost by death there twenty-two priests in thirteen years! Climate!

This is a gorgeous place.

. . . If it is any satisfaction, let me say that the food here is *excellent*, with a bottle of wine each, and a glass of marsala and coffee to follow!

The church of San Silvestro to which Hugh went was typically Roman, cool, calm, and splendid, with vast spaces made gorgeous by bronze and marble and damask, and pathetic with the offerings of the poor. The silence, broken by the sudden clatter of shifted chairs or jangled rosary beads, the subtle reminiscence of incense and burning wax, different in Italian churches, somehow, from anywhere else, are the more significant in San Silvestro, seeing that you turn off to it inwards from the uproarious Corso, or descend from the worldly Quirinal and newer quarters with their cosmopolitan hotels. You go through the arcaded passage to the atrium of a church built, with a monastery, for Basilian monks, by Paul I, pope some twelve centuries ago. The bodies of two more popes, St. Dionysius and St. Zephyrinus, and the head of St. Silvester, are relics there. St. Tarcisius, a boy acolyte of persecution days, lay there too. Part of the Baptist's skull had been stored there, and gave the church its added title of *in Capite*. This, in 1870, had been removed to the Vatican; Hugh was to see it solemnly restored, but not the Volto Santo, a portrait of Our Lord, painted in ancient times, and owned by King Abgar of Edessa.

But the atrium was made sinister by yet other memories of blood. More than one thousand years ago, Pope St. Leo III had been dragged into it by a murderous gang, who stripped him, stoned him, and tore out his eyes and tongue in San Silvestro. Benedictines had followed the Basilians, and in 1277 the Poor Clares were given the monastery, and there, in Franciscan poverty and prayer, they lived till, in 1849, the ex-priest Gavazzi drove them out to make room for Garibaldi and his red-shirts. They returned, but again, in 1871, they were evicted, and postal and telegraphic servants and public offices established themselves within these ancient walls "brunis," as Huysmans wrote, "par la prière." Into this haunted atmosphere Hugh Benson came to live. Enough of the old building still was standing for the terrific soul-forces, which, by his own theory, through so many murderous and mystical centuries must have drenched them, to re-issue, as kind or dreadful influences, and penetrate his spirit. But at first his impressions were confused and over-rapid.

His stay, however, in Rome falls definitely into two parts—the earlier, during which his mind was occupied with half a hundred different trains of thought and his days with a rush of vehement activities, and the later, when all his attention was concentrated on his ordination and his future. It seems best, therefore, that, after a short account of the outline into which his daily occupations fell, I should collect from his letters his dominant impressions and arrange them under certain heads—thus, his visits to the Pope, his literary occupations, the acquaintances he made, and the like; and then, that I should relate consecutively his plans for the future, as, throughout his stay, they grew, altered, and finally took definite shape and were realised.

Of Hugh's first days in Rome it may most simply be said that they bewildered and bored him.

On November 11, indeed, he was fresh enough to write to Father G. W. Hart:

Here, as you see, I am at the centre of papistry. Mr. —— and I are here together—the only two Englishmen; all the others—he gives a list of some five or six names—are at the "Beda," which is an annexe of the English College, and one or two more at the "Procura" of S. Sulpice. We here have entire liberty; no rules at all, except to mention it if we propose to be out after 10 P.M. But, as a matter of fact, our day is as follows: rise about 6 A.M. (—— hammers on my wall). Then we go down to church about 6.20, and remain there, going "*as* you please" till 7.20--beads, hours, meditation, prayer, communion, while masses rumble on at three altars out of the nine. (Such a *lovely* church—frescoed, chapels, marbles, idols, &c.) Then at any time that we feel we have had enough, generally about 7.20, we go to the house again, through a lovely palm courtyard, and breakfast off coffee and rolls. Then follows a brief breathing space, and then lecture at the PROPAGANDA, in Latin (!), at 8–9; huge crowds of students—French, English, German, Spanish, Greek. . . . Then back home and shave and read and write letters and see people till 12.30; then déjeuner, with coffee afterwards (!); then lecture, 1.45–2.45; then sleep or walk till 4 or 5, when I make tea in my own room (high up, looking on to a courtyard filled with trees, tiled, cool); then read or write again and go to Benediction, generally in church about 5.30; 7.30, supper; then talk or hear music or pray or read till 9.30–10; bed. Rather a sound day!

As for ourselves, we look pretty startling too, in huge furry hats and tassels and ferridas and buckles, and we go swelling and bulging about as if we had done it for years.

But on December 4 he is becoming depressed, and writes to another friend:

We (1) get up 6–6.30, go down to church and pray till 7.20–7.30; breakfast; lecture, 8–9; shave, dawdle a

little, and then read till 12.30; dinner, 12.30–1.30; lecture, 1.30–2.30, dawdle and walk till any hour—4, 4.30, 5, 5.30; tea in one's own room; read; 7.30, supper; dawdle, talk; bed, 9.30–10. A misspent day rather, with an abnormal amount of idleness; but such is the system, and one can but follow it.

I dined with B—— at a hotel near . . . he is a good sort, exceedingly humble. I shouldn't be a bit surprised if he became a Catholic some day; he has the sort of mind that takes easily to this religion. I wish I had! But, frankly, I haven't. Nothing in the world would have made me one, except the certainty that it is true, in spite of all the surface things that I fear will never be congenial to me.

Well, do send a line again soon to cheer me up. I am an exile and a wanderer.

He is repeating what he had said to Mr. A. C. Benson—namely, that on first joining the Catholic Church he felt like a lost dog; while on November 26, 1903, he had written:

My own news is almost impossible to tell, as everything is simply bewildering. In about five years from now I shall know how I felt, but at present I feel nothing but discomfort. I hate foreign countries and foreign people, and am finding more every day how hopelessly insular I am, because, of course, under the circumstances, this is the proper place for me to be, but it is a kind of dentist's chair.

Not that the *maiestas aurea Romæ*, the sovereignty of that Rome which had made one city of the world, escaped him long; and sometimes his recognition of Rome's catholicity will be ecstatic, sometimes just a quiet registration of the fact.

On November 19 he wrote to the Rev. J. H. Molesworth:

It is indeed extraordinary to be out here, and to feel that one is an insider of it all, that one has a recognised right to Communion, and so on. But I think the thing

(since you ask) that impresses me most is the Catholicity as contrasted with the Nationalism of England. Of course one has always recognised that variety of temperaments, &c., is of God; but also that the work of Grace is to weld that variety into a visible as well as an invisible whole, and it is that that is so wonderfully evident here—*e.g.* the first Mass I heard here was said by a German, served by an African negro, and attended by Italians and myself. Every meal I am at, too, is shared by English, Americans, Italians, Germans, Canadians—all absolutely one in faith. And, above all, the lectures one attends have to be given in Latin, as the students are English, French, Germans, Italians, Americans, Canadians, Greeks, Armenians. It is a sort of sacrament of the City of God every time one goes. The effect of the argument is tremendous on the assurance of one's convictions.

And at the very moment that he says, with disconcerting frankness, that he hasn't "the sort of mind" that "takes to" Italian religion, he never for a moment confuses the ritualistic exigencies of temperament with the fundamendal reactions of faith. We shall see this more clearly later on. Meanwhile he notes:

If people of my bringing-up and cast of mind see one side of things, and have hold of one hand of Our Blessed Lord, these hot Italians have hold of another; and one dare not say that one side is better or truer than another.

One triviality that at first made him despair was the musical shortcomings of Rome, though fortunately he began by hearing a papal choir practice "in a dirty little chapel off a back street," followed by an introduction to Maestro Perosi. "The singing—Palestrina—was SUPERB." But this good promise was not fulfilled. On November 15 he and Mr. —— "wandered all over the place, trying to find a sung Mass, but could not—it was over in the only church where they had a respectable choir. The choirs are fearful here. Horsted Keynes is a paradise of music

compared to it, except just one or two, which are really good; and the organ-playing is awful too." This at least was saved him when in St. Callixtus's Catacombs he hears "lovely unaccompanied four-part Palestrina music, with plain-song."

But besides the austerity of plain-song, the suave melodies of Anglican hymn-tunes haunt him. He spends an evening with "a really nice convert lady, who loves the Church of England and the people in it; and we talked like conspirators for two hours; and somebody was playing *Hymns Ancient and Modern* next door all the while; and we really enjoyed ourselves." Another evening he spends in playing these hymns, after "a funny little men's dinner-party of converts—Anglicans." "We all said how much nicer they were than anything we hear in this eternal old city."

Easter, however, especially the Benedictus of Tenebrae, and, of course, the *Exultet*, and the singing at the Benedictine Monastery of Sant' Anselmo, enraptured him; nor had he ever heard anything to compare with the congregational singing of Rome when, at *Te Deums*, for instance, the thousands who had flocked to St. Peter's would roar the hymn in unison. "I," he adds, "made a loud, buzzing noise with my mouth. . . . I didn't know the words by heart."

His relations with San Silvestro were at all times excellent. He catalogues his food-stuffs for the consolation of his old nurse Beth. His John Bullism displays itself pleasantly enough when meals have to be mentioned. On November 18 he had rashly allowed it to be known that it was his birthday.

On Wednesday my health was solemnly drunk by everyone, proposed by Mgr. —— (delightful; a wonderful

musician), in a bottle of peculiarly solemn wine, grandly fetched from the cellar; and I had to smirk and grin and pretend it was all right. What queer ways they have! I was expecting to have to make a speech.

"We have had," he writes on February 14, "a huge dinner-party as usual again to-day—12.45–3 P.M.!—more wearisome than one could believe possible, with about eight courses and a great deal too much to drink, and a quantity of tiresome people. I beguiled it by doing conjuring tricks to [my neighbours] Scotch and Irish [respectively], and asking a lot of riddles about two trains, and 'that man's father is my father's son.' And I had positively to write out the whole thing and draw a portrait in a gilt frame before the Irishman could see it."

Whenever an English personage of importance visited Rome, he, with "swarms of doubtful counts" (Hugh, like Sir Nevill Fanning, could not take foreign titles seriously), had to be entertained at these pontifical repasts.

The heavy ecclesiastical hospitalities prolonged themselves, culminating in the "horrible banquet" of his ordination day, when he had, during the much health-drinking, "to look down his nose a good deal."

To Benson, accustomed to his "proper English breakfast," and, above all, to *no* siesta after the stupefying meal of midday, these feastings were, of course, exceptionally disconcerting. What with these, and a little later his constant dinners and lunches with his friends, he found himself, ruefully, to have eaten more at Rome than in any one year of his English life. . . . Lent, however, took its revenge. Long ago he had written to a friend, from Mirfield, that he *hated* Lent, and that Easter seemed an impossible dream. To him, too, he confesses that at Rome, in Lent, he goes very cold and hungry and half asleep.

At once, and naturally, he made off to see the Pope.

Nov. 7.[1]

. . . To-day I have interviewed an Archbishop and seen the Pope!

We went this afternoon to one of the courtyards (Mr. —— and I) of the Vatican, by ticket—a huge place, *crammed* with a garlicky crowd, and all the roofs and windows filled.[2] A huge red canopy was at the wall at the end, with Swiss halberdiers, all on a platform, and a blaring band below. . . . He was half an hour late. At last we saw halberds going along behind, in the cloister; and the crowd began to sway and roar, and a woman fainted next to me. And then he came on, all in white, bowing and smiling, and the people bellowing "Evviva," and so on. And then he sat down and put on a large red hat; and all his Court, in purple and red, standing round; and a choir sang two odes (?).

And then, at last, he stood up and preached for about ten minutes, in a mellow voice, very strong, with a few beautiful gestures, spreading his hands out. And then, after he had intoned a versicle and response, he gave the Apostolic benediction; and everybody crossed themselves and roared out Amen. Then somebody put on him his hat again, and an immense scarlet cloak; and the effect of colour was quite extraordinary; and the people howled with delight. Then he walked very slowly round the edge of the platform, blessing and waving his hand and *beaming;* he was very much flushed with preaching; and then, at last, he went back. It was glorious. Every tongue and nation was there—Germans and English and French. . . !! Lor!

I am going probably to get an audience with the Pope in a few days, in the general English pilgrimage; and shall get presented to him. It is a vast affair; and the Archbishop told me too to get introduced by a bishop to a private audience. So I shall keep my eyes open. . . .

[1] So dated. But from the ticket the date appears to have been the 8th; the hour was 3 P.M.

[2] "Of course," he wrote to Father C. Bickersteth, "I thought of the quarry."

I will add at once his narration of other papal and, so to say, semi-papal interviews he had during this stay in Rome.

November 15.

. . . On Tuesday we went to congratulate Merry del Val on his Cardinalate. Gorgeous rooms! the Borgia apartments in the Vatican. Alexander VI lived there; and Julius II was the last inhabitant. We went in through the Swiss Guard and immense Gendarmes; a secretary in dress clothes, at 11 A.M., took our names down. And then we went in. He was cordial and nice. He said he had read Papa's life with great interest; and then told me to tell him at any time if there was anything he could do for me, as he is Secretary of State, and a number of other things; I imagine there will be a few things by and by. (It is rather pleasing etiquette that in the Vatican people kneel to nobody except the Pope.)

Then on Thursday [Nov. 12] we went to the Sala Ducale to see the Pope and Cardinals go by to a Consistory. The Pope walked, instead of being carried; and was not so impressive as on Sunday; he looked tired and miserable, in an enormous mitre glittering all over with diamonds, and a cope. And there was no music! Even a court band would have improved it.

Again on November 29 he writes:

We all went on Sunday [Nov. 24, at 3.30 P.M.] with the English pilgrims to an audience at the Vatican; but it was nothing much — the Pope just passed along, giving his hand to be kissed by each person in turn; and that was about all. He obviously hates functions, and looked bored and depressed. He dislikes being Pope, I believe, quite inexpressibly.

He did not obtain the privilege coveted by all Catholic pilgrims, of assisting at the Pope's Mass and receiving Holy Communion from his hand, till January 31, 1904, at 7.15 A.M.

January 30.

. . . Earlier in the week we went to call on Mgr. Bisletti, the Pope's secretary, to give in our names for

the Mass; he lives in large rooms entirely furnished in red damask and gold, and is a little man, like a fox-terrier, with his head on one side, in purple silk.

The permission came late on January 29, in "a large white envelope, fastened with a scarlet wafer, like a letter on the stage."

On January 31, therefore:

We went to the Vatican, up staircases and through marble and crimson and tapestry rooms, into a crimson damask room with two folding doors at the end, wide open, and an altar all gold and candles beyond. Then suddenly the Pope appeared, ruddy-brown face, white cassock and cap, and gave his blessing in the doorway, then vested at the altar, with three officials helping him; in a purple jewelled chasuble. . . . He said Mass at a moderate pace and voice, with a rather pathetic intonation; and gave us all Communion at the altar-rail at the end; then he unvested and knelt during another Mass said by a chaplain; then gave us his blessing silently and disappeared. And that is all one can say; but it left an extraordinary sense of simplicity and humility; there was not the suspicion of an air of a great prelate, except in his supreme naturalness.

Pope Pius X used not to make the dazzling impression on his visitors which Leo XIII produced. Pope Leo's smile enveloped you like a flame, his gestures lashed the dullest into alert attention, and his glances were like electric shocks. Pius X resembled Pio Nono not only in feature, as his portraits prove, but in a certain bonhomie, so we are told, and a twinkle of humour, when he was not too tired, which charmed many whom Leo's vitality terrified. But beyond all else, I think it was the supreme recollectedness of Pius X which remained in one's memory; his eyes looked at you often from an immense distance; and his voice was not without its note of awe even when he laughed, and even when he asked the most practical

questions about, shall I say, food, or studies, or workmen's clubs, or Oxford. This was for something in that quality of *Greatness* Hugh diagnosed in him: "To-morrow," he wrote on Low Sunday to his mother, "will be splendid, when the Pope says Mass in St. Peter's. But he is Large too—and likes proper things and people; and proper music, and not MUCK; and the salvation of souls, and children."

The note of "Largeness" remained with him.

"It was overwhelming!" he wrote.[1] "The whole church was cobbled with heads, and over that pavement came the huge canopy, with the great jewelled figure below it, and the solemn fans waving behind. That was one of the keenest moments. In front came an almost endless row of mitres moving along. Then the plain-song was like one enormous deliberate voice talking, and every now and then shouting, in that enormous place. And then, of course, the final great moment was the Elevation, in dead silence, and only broken by the silver trumpets exulting up in the dome. It gave one an extraordinary sense of consummation—the vision of Christ offering Christ, in the very centre of the world, with representatives of the whole Christian world there, and the angels blowing their trumpets overhead. One felt as if everything that was important or real was focused there . . . other things seem very small after that."[2]

He had no more audiences from the Pope, I think, until just before his departure from Rome, when he armed himself with many blessings, and obtained the Pope's

[1] *Spiritual Letters*, p. 72.

[2] He does not mention a delightful and characteristic incident. Pius X disliked the fluttered handkerchiefs and cheers for the Pope-king which gave Leo XIII such keen satisfaction. He had ordered that there should be nothing of the sort. None the less, during a certain ceremony, the suppressed enthusiasm of the crowd was beginning to break out at certain points. Benson leapt passionately on to his bench, and with waving arms and energetic hushing enforced silence so very authoritatively, that the Who is he? eagerly asked by all around, sufficiently substituted a new centre of disturbance.

white silk skull-cap,[1] according to custom, offering an exactly similar one in exchange. He obtained a special blessing for "Father Benson's family and nurse, and three books," and also permission to say Mass in his mother's house. This took place on June 24th.

However, for a mind constituted as his was, the Pope's presence was always present as a kind of sustained pedal note in the changing harmonies of Rome. Wherever you are, on the Quirinal as on the Palatine, in the Corso and Trastevere, it is quite impossible to forget him. He foresaw that Catholicism would become ever "more papalistic and more liberal." Such, indeed, was his own career. The Pope haunted him, and it is in his two strange books, *Lord of the World* and *The Dawn of All*, that he gives full play to his homage to the "Christ on Earth," as St. Catherine of Siena so boldly used to call Christ's Vicar. In *The Lord of the World*, Pius X is most directly recalled. He is John XXIV, the *Papa Angelicus* who "had cared, it appeared, nothing whatever for the world's opinion; his policy, so far as it could be called one, consisted in a very simple thing; he had declared in epistle after epistle that the object of the Church was to do glory to God by producing supernatural virtues in man, and that nothing at all was of any significance or importance except in so far as it effected this object." However, this John XXIV was as vigorous an organiser as ever was Pope Pius, whose reforming activity so much disconcerted his contemporaries. Pius X made a very strong hand felt throughout the world of seminaries, of ecclesiastical law, of music and of art, of criticism, of journalism, of social work; though it was in his supreme resolve to "recapitulate all things into Christ," his campaign against modern-

[1] It is now in a glass case in the middle of the Hare Street library mantelpiece.

ism, and his decrees about Communion, that he struck that great blow for the supernatural which Benson more quaintly imaged forth by the transformation of Rome by Papa Angelicus into a mediaeval city. However, Pope John was, in Benson's mind, the summing-up, no less, of all the Visible Church. His face, with its hawk's eyes, its clear-cut, yet passionate lips, its firm chin, its generous and sweet poise, "between defiance and humility," and its strange youthfulness, was indistinguishable from a "composite photo" of representative priests, when exhibited to laughing crowds at music-halls. In the novel, of course, Julian Felsenburgh, the Antichrist, is not so much an incarnation of Satan, as the adequate representative of humanwise perfect Man, called, therefore, by the New Thought, divine. But this Pope was his absolute and final contrast, inasmuch as he on his side summed up, representatively, the Church, the body of the Incarnate God. "One of the two, John and Julian, was the Vicar, and the other, the Ape, of God." "The two cities of Augustine lay for him to choose." In their measure, too, the kings and emperors, "the lonely survivors of that strange company of persons who, till half a century ago, had reigned as God's temporal Vicegerents with the consent of their subjects," proclaimed the insufficiency of human sanction and authority. It would be well, if there were space here, to quote the very gorgeous pages in which Benson describes the procession of their monstrous coaches, with their eight horses, "the white of France and Spain, the black of Germany, Italy, and Russia, and the cream-coloured of England." Lions, leopards, and eagles guarded the royal crown upon the roof of each; up scarlet carpets, between rows of glimmering halberds, the tremendous Royalties passed, until they sat, in splendid isolation, beneath great baldachins, on whose damask

surfaces "burned gigantic coats supported by beasts and topped by crowns." The papal procession entered: trumpets cried aloud, and the tens of thousands, crowding the basilica, roared acclamation to the Supreme Pontiff.

Far ahead, seeming to cleave its way through the surging heads, like the poop of an ancient ship, moved the canopy beneath which sat the Lord of the World; and between him and the priests, as if it were the wake of that same ship, swayed the gorgeous procession—protonotaries apostolic, generals of religious orders, and the rest—making its way along with white, gold, scarlet, and silver foam between the living banks on either side. Overhead hung the splendid barrel of the roof, and far in front the haven of God's altar reared its monstrous pillars, beneath which burned the seven yellow stars that were the harbour lights of sanctity. It was an astonishing sight, but too vast and bewildering to do anything but oppress the observers with a consciousness of their own futility. The enormous enclosed air, the giant statues, the dim and distant roofs, the indescribable concert of sound—of the movement of feet, the murmur of ten thousand voices, the peal of organs like the crying of gnats, the thin celestial music—the faint, suggestive smell of incense and men and bruised may and myrtle; and, supreme above all, the vibrant atmosphere of human emotion, shot with supernatural aspiration, as the Hope of the World, the holder of the Divine Viceroyalty, passed on his way to stand between God and man.

The Pope stood at the altar; to him, driven from their thrones, came the kings and emperors to minister at the Mass. They poured water, they placed cushions, they bore his train. Towering above the world was the figure of Christ's Vicar, until, the miracle being accomplished, the Christ himself was there, and Pope and kings bowed equally before their Lord.[1]

[1] When Percy Franklin himself is Pope, the allegory is completed, but the scene and incidents are no longer drawn from Benson's experience of Rome. They stand separate and on their own merits, and I will speak of them when *The Lord of the World* must be alluded to.

Benson's love for pageantry reveals itself again in the *Dawn of All*, where the Pope, Temporal Ruler of all Italy, and practically acknowledged by the whole world as its spiritual lord, rides triumphant across Rome. The same "stage-properties," if I may call them so, repeat themselves; the self-same adjectives are used. The out-of-door procession replaces the progress through St. Peter's; the blessing from the balcony is substituted for the Mass. A tremendous reception, glittering and noisy, displays the Vatican, from an exactly opposite point of view, as a focus of power. But Benson is insisting on a subtly differentiated doctrine. In both novels the Pope stands for spirit acting through the flesh; but in the first the emphasis is on the spirit; in the second on its incarnational vehicle, so to say. The Pope is the average man; he is a safe financier; he has never faced a crisis, but is sound at business. . . . He offers to the world that heavily human aspect which enabled Benson, in anglicising Giuseppe Sarto's surname, deliberately to speak of Pius X as Bishop Taylor. This jars on perhaps a majority of hearers. But why deny the fact? It is a supreme illustration of his ruthless recognition that that in which the spirit incarnates itself is flesh and nothing else. It is utterly of a piece with his displeasing portraitures of priests, his relentless ridicule of ecclesiastical art and jargon and mannerism. It would be false wholly, I will not say to his exterior attitude, but to something very deep-set in him indeed, were it to be disguised that in his sacramental construing of all life, he deliberately and rather brutally insisted on the human coefficient throughout. Observe, too, that in the later novel the balance is redressed with skill, almost with ingenuity. The Monsignor, inclined to think this Catholicism too worldly, leaves the reception, loses his way in the labyrinthine Vatican, pushes open an

unguarded door, and surprises the Pope at confession to a Franciscan friar. He was overwhelmed.

. . . He had seen nothing remarkable in itself—the Pope at confession. And yet in some manner, beyond the fact that he had groped his way, all unknowing, to the Pope's private apartments, and at such a moment, the dramatic contrast between the glare and noise of the reception outside, itself the climax of a series of brilliant external splendours, and the silent, half-lighted chapel where the Lord of all kneeled to confess his sins, caused a surprising disturbance in his soul.

Up to now he had been introduced step by step into a new set of experiences, Christian indeed, yet amazingly worldly in their aspect; he had begun to learn that religion could transform the outer world, and affect and use for its own purposes all the pomps and glories of outward existence; he had begun to realise that there was nothing alien to God, no line of division between the Creator and the creature; and now, in one instant, he had been brought face to face again with inner realities, and had seen, as it were, a glimpse of the secret core of all the splendour. The Pope, attended by princes, the Pope on his knees before a bare-footed friar; these were the two magnetic points between which blazed religion.

Thus then the spiritual element is re-introduced, and the humiliation of the flesh is only the more sharply emphasized.

A series of religious functions makes Rome unique among the world's modern capitals.

From the outset Benson assists, much puzzled how to judge them, at these displays which alternately inspire and disconcert him.

San Silvestro in Capite,
November 20.

I am beginning this letter earlier this week, as there will be a rush on Sunday, I expect, as I am going off to St. Callixtus's Catacomb for Mass, as it is St. Cecilia's Day. (Privately I am not quite sure of the connection, but daren't ask. I am nearly sure that her body was found there.) . . .

On the 18th I went to Vespers and the exhibition of relics in S. Peter's, as it was the dedication festival. This last ceremony was immensely impressive. Vespers were booming away in a chapel, and had been for about an hour; and the church was getting darker and darker. There were no lights except on the altars all round, and they only looked like tiny sparks; and the confession and papal altar was twinkling like a Christmas tree; but it was so dark in the top of the nave that one could not recognise faces. Then suddenly the bells jangled loud; a procession with lights and a bishop with a cope and mitre, and Rampolla in scarlet, came out of the chapel with a great crowd following; the lights went up everywhere simultaneously, everybody went on their knees, and right up in a gallery in the dome, where eight huge candles were burning, a man appeared, a little figure in white, with a reliquary, which he waved up and down as he walked to and fro. First he showed the Lance, then the True Cross, then the handkerchief of St. Veronica. Then he disappeared, everybody got up and went away, and it was over.

But I don't really like functions; I wish I did, because it is the chief occupation of everyone to go to them. Yesterday, as I had a little cold, I stayed indoors all day and worked in the library, and wrote letters and saw nobody, and *loved* it.

On Sunday he adds:

Yesterday I went to St. Cecilia's Church! My word! It was her eve. The church was *crammed;* and a magnificent choir was singing Vespers and "In Organis Cantantibus." Below the High Altar is her body: the tomb blazing with lights, and a crowd fighting to get near it; the crypt of the church is her house, with all the mosaics left that she trod upon. She was half-beheaded, you know, and lived three days, and then "fell asleep"; and her body was found in the catacomb, her head on her hand, lying on her side, as if in a natural deep sleep. The stone where it was found forms an altar-slab in the crypt; and people were kneeling there and kissing it and laying their rosaries on it to-day; while that glorious choir was pealing away overhead. My word!! The Communion of Saints means something here; there were bishops, and peasants, and bald-headed men, and children all crowding everywhere;

every chair taken; hundreds standing, and walking, and kneeling as they liked. Really this religion is alive.

But more extraordinary than anything was Mass this morning in St. Callixtus's Catacomb, sixty feet down; High Mass in the chapel where her body was found, lovely four-part unaccompanied Palestrinian music, with plain-song; a crowd crammed along the passages of the catacombs; the whole place full of red and white chrysanthemums and altars with hundreds of candles. One went straight back 1800 years, when the same words and language were used in the same place. It has touched me far more than anything in Rome.

He took the habit of attending Mass at certain catacombs on the patronal day of their chief martyr, and would send home box-leaves from their decoration. The spell of the catacombs never diminished for him, and you will find that in *Initiation* the scene in the catacombs is more touched with genuine emotion than almost any other.

He participates next week in a Cardinal's Mass, and a colossal procession of the Blessed Sacrament in St. John Lateran, and, perhaps because the unaccompanied choir sang Palestrina exquisitely, ends with the outcry, which will grow frequent, "It was a *gorgeous* ceremony."

On December 19 he and a friend attended an Ordination, also at the Lateran, the late Archbishop Stonor's kindness having obtained seats for them. On their arrival at 8.35 A.M. the ceremony had "well begun," and was not finished at 12. "There is a tremendous moment when the choir is filled with men in albs, flat on their faces, without stirring. This goes on for about ten minutes, as the Litany of the Saints is sung. Tremendous! All the names of the Archangels and Saints one after another, followed by 'Ora pro nobis,' until you are aware that the entire Court of Heaven is assisting. . . ."

In Rome, it may not generally be known, many other

rites are observed besides the Roman, especially about the time of the Epiphany, which was from the outset the Eastern Christmas. Benson did not appreciate them. "There has been," he wrote on January 10,

. . . a round of Oriental rites here, with choirs howling like Dervishes, and tinkling long poles with bells on them, and beating tom-toms; and that is about all. I suppose it would be very interesting if one knew what it was all about; but, as it is, it is only rather interesting.

He returned with satisfaction to popular and really Roman ceremonies.

Thus at Ara Cœli, on the last day of the Epiphany Octave, an "amazing" Te Deum was

sung by the choir and BELLOWED by the congregation in alternate verses; a Bishop made a sermon, holding the Bambino in his left arm, from the altar-steps, to a packed crowd, who rushed up to kiss its silver foot after. It was really most beautiful and impressive.

The popular singing of Te Deums always impressed him. On the 19th of March, Feast of St. Joseph, and the Pope's name-day, he mingled with the twenty thousand worshippers who thronged St. Peter's, and with whom, when "they ROARED the Te Deum," he, not knowing the words, made the "loud buzzing sound" already told of. But it was with Holy Week that the real "whirl of ceremonies" began. The fifty thousand at St. Peter's for Thursday Tenebrae, the hundred thousand who visited San Silvestro's Altar of Repose on that same day, impress him, but

best of all, and one of the few ceremonies at which there was sufficient peace to pray, was at S. Teodoro's on Good Friday morning: a little round reddish church, on the foot of the Palatine, just below the Cæsars' palaces. It was striking to hear there, "If thou let this Man go, thou art not Cæsar's friend," and "Whosoever maketh himself

king speaketh against Cæsar!" There was a choir there, a mediaeval Guild, entirely of Roman nobles, in sackcloth and ropes and hoods, who kissed the crucifix barefooted at the "Creeping to the Cross." And there was only a small congregation, and I had a chair, which is a luxury at great functions.[1]

Then, [he goes on,] it was heavenly this morning at St. John Lateran—I got there at seven, and met carts drawn by oxen and piled with olive-branches coming in from the country. The first main ceremony was the blessing of the fire by the Cardinal Vicar; this was done in the transept; then one of three candles on a pole all wreathed with roses was lighted, then another a few steps farther on, and then the third; and at each the deacon in white sang out "Lumen Christi," and everyone roared "Deo Gratias."

Then he sang the "Exultet"—such a song!—from a pulpit, and lighted the huge Paschal Candle in the middle, and went on with "Sursum Corda." . . . Then I rushed out about nine, and got coffee at a shop, and ran back to the Baptistery, which was all strewn with myrtle and flowers; then the procession came in singing "Like as the hart desireth the water-brooks," and the water was blessed and a Jew-child baptized. It was glorious; and then the procession came out again across the square and back to the church; and Mass began in white vestments; then the climax came at the "Gloria in Excelsis." The Cardinal put on an enormous gold mitre and *bellowed* the first words, then the organ and ALL the bells roared and jangled for the first time in a sort of frenzied voluntary; and then the choir began; and when I came out, as it was late, all the bells in Rome were ringing—MY GOODNESS ME! What a religion it is! You feel that the entire creation has part in it, and that nothing is common or unclean after Christianity has taken it in charge.

Easter by Easter his soul will exult in tune with this resurrection-hymn, and to it he consecrates some of the most sweet and childlike of the pages in his *Papers of a Pariah*. On Holy Saturday he watches the blessing of

[1] A small sketch of a penitent follows. It has its vitality: the bare toes are wisely allowed to overlap the margin. Hands and feet are the last detail an untrained pencil is willing to attempt.

clear fire and water, of holy gums and spices, and of paschal wax. The "Exultet" was intoned :

It was a song such as none but a Christian could ever sing. It soared, dropped, quavered, leapt again, laughed, danced, rippled, sank, leapt once more, on and on, untiring and undismayed, like a stream running clear to the sea. Angels, earth, trumpets, Mother Church, all nations and all peoples sang in its singing. And I, in my stiff pew, smiled all over my face with sheer joy and love.

He piles up quaint appreciations and childlike speculations : the "wealth of divine contradiction, delirious paradox, and childlike wisdom" of this master-song enchant him.

I wonder if anyone will think me irreverent in my thoughts ? They will be wrong if they do, for I am as sure as I can be that this is more or less what the Catholic Church meant me to think. She wished me to be as happy as a child—happy because Jesus Christ was risen, and because she was happy . . . God who has made the sun and the sea, who shines and rains upon just and unjust alike, will not be angry with me because I loved to see how He can deal with plain things—how He can make water holy as well as beautiful, and fire to lighten souls as well as eyes. . . .

Noticeable, then, as an element in these great ecclesiastical pageantries, was the enthusiastic devotion of the people. The spectacle of masses of men and women not only joining with passion and intelligence in a superb ritual, but wanting *that* ritual, and finding it in their blood, and coming to it as to an enthralling beauty ever old and ever new, was unknown, hitherto, to Benson. It witnessed to a mode of inner life, to exigencies of worship, to an incarnate mysticism, with which he was thoroughly in tune. I have said how, in the Pope, he diagnosed a supreme example of spiritual power expressing itself through flesh. An encounter he made within a week or

two of his arrival impressed him in a similar fashion, and in letters, right and left, he alludes to it:

November 15.

Yesterday after lecture an old man was pointed out to me in the garden in a filthy old cassock and hat, and unshaven, but with one of the most ethereal faces I have ever seen. There was a group of stolid working-men staring at him; and Father Vaughan whispered to me that he was going to be a saint some day. It is one of the things in Rome to see him say Mass! and he, of course, is blankly unconscious of it all. It is so interesting to see a saint in the making.

In the behaviour of the people, especially in their relation to the Blessed Sacrament, he finds the same spirit expressing itself.

"The two pivots," he exclaims, "on which all life turns, are Our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament, and His people." And again and again he laments that people who come to Rome permit themselves to see only the wrong things. "They don't know how to find the people at their prayers."

November 7.

The religion here is astonishing. Crowds of people here at every Mass and Benediction. Last night in the Redemptorist church there was some splendid popular singing, like a Mission. And insects abounded.

And a week later he wrote to Miss Kyle:

November 14.

A couple of days ago in this church here, in about three minutes, the following things happened within a yard of me. First a man came, knelt before "Our Lady Hope of England," crossed himself with oil from her lamp; another came, knelt, said the prayer for England, kissed the glass in which it was framed, and went away. Then I moved to the Pietà; one man was already kneeling there, and in a moment more came another, moaning out prayers aloud as he came, knelt, stretched out his rosary towards the images with hands outstretched, got up, reached towards

the railing, touched Our Lady's foot, kissed his hand that had touched it, and went away.

And that kind of thing is going on all day, everywhere.

"In the evening," he elsewhere writes,[1] after an almost textual reproduction of the above, "I went to the gallery, where I was alone. Benediction was going on below; nothing to attract; hideous music, the continued creaking and groaning of chairs, no organ or choir, and a crowd of seventy or eighty people (just an ordinary week-night), and a breathless, rapt silence at the moment itself. The atmosphere of faith and worship was overwhelming, especially as it was so singularly unattractive from every physical point of view. . . . Yet [there was] this crowd, scattered in a great disorderly group, all adoring That which was in the monstrance in the little dim side-chapel. And that goes on night after night all the year round, and this church is not exceptional at all. . . . The devotion of the people is beyond all description, especially, I really think, of the men, who form quite half, if not more, of all the mid-day congregations.

"Everyone gets his own chair and kneels, and plants it exactly where he likes, at any angle, pointed towards any Mass that he likes. . . . I was watching a well-dressed man this morning, with no book, but whose lips were moving quite incessantly; and another, a rough-haired boy from the country, absolutely rapt and motionless, kneeling on the stones, with his face hidden for, I should think, half an hour. The sense of worship is beyond anything I have ever dreamt of out of heaven."[2]

It was, of course, at the Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament that these displays of popular yet intimate devotion reached their most poignant manifestations. On March 26 the Quarant' Ore was proceeding at San Silvestro.

It is most moving. I looked into the church at midnight, last night, from the grating, and there were four men kneeling and praying, and the altar was blazing with candles, and great banks of white flowers on each side running down the flight of steps into the church. The

[1] *Spiritual Letters*, p. 53. [2] *Ibid.*, p. 64.

Queen is there now, with her ladies on each side. She has sent most of the flowers too. There is always at least one church all the year round in Rome where it goes on, and it is always well filled all day. It is one of the most overwhelming things in the whole place. Men take the night watches, of four hours each—10–2, 2–6.

A similar centre of devotion was San Claudio, close by. He refers to it so often that, at the risk of being tedious, I shall quote from the letter to Father G. W. Hart of November 11:

And now for the real thing. The religion is something surprising. You cannot find a church that is not continually alive with people of every sort and class, all mixed. It is almost impossible to select, but two stand out in one's mind: (1) the Redemptorists[1] [sketch]; on Saturday evening we went there for shriving; the church was full, organ booming a litany, people and priests roaring it; lights blazing, "Our Lady of Perpetual Succour" beaming in a corona of candles over the high altar, and incense reeking. At the moment of benediction the organ blared out, and the bells began to peal feverishly; I wept; there was indescribable melody and light. (2) St. Claud—Perpetual Exposition goes on here. The Blessed Sacrament stands continually with a great ermine robe behind it[2] [sketch], and a crown over it, and candles below, with men in cottas kneeling before it, and the body of the church humming with prayer. The devotion of the people is quite beyond describing. I don't know what people mean when they say that the worship of Our Lady is thought more of than of the Blessed Sacrament. There is nothing resembling it. There is perpetual and fervent enthusiasm. . . .

As somebody said, papists out here are like spoilt children of God, as entirely at home as in their own houses. I have watched children during Mass sitting flat in the middle of an inlaid floor, treating it as a kind of castle, and tracing its foundations with filthy fingers. But the prayers of them and the people, when they set themselves to it, are

[1] He finds the Redemptorists' work incomparably efficacious, but, curiously enough, never (that I know of) showed signs of wanting to join their Company.

[2] The coronation robe of Napoleon I.

simply indescribable. They fetch a chair, making it squeak all across the floor; plant it where they like, have a word or two with a friend, fumble about for beads, then kneel down solid on the stone floor, and remain entirely motionless for half an hour. I have watched a big boy here once or twice, a Yahoo with matted hair, in a kind of yellow suit, dirty beyond description, absolutely motionless, kneeling for half an hour before the Blessed Sacrament. My goodness me! You come into a church at any hour you like, and there are at least half a dozen people, men and women equally, sitting in the very middle of the magnificent marble floor, with their hands before them, looking, and looking, and looking at the tabernacle. And you go out half an hour later, after wandering round, and there they are still.

Well, I could go on for ever, but I won't. But the reality of it all is beyond all description.

On November 20, he wrote to Mrs. Benson that while he is getting lower and lower at the thoughts of the certain refusal, by his prospective publishers, of his book *By What Authority?* he is already devising the plot of another one, of Charles II's period. I reserve, for the moment, the many references to this book, and I will indicate the kind of religious preoccupations which made a mental background for a life in which such ceremonies as I have described stand more visibly in relief.

In November, his days still were cursed with fatigue and boredom within, and thunder and rain without—"quite like an English June."

Sunday, November 28.

. . . I dream of Horsted Keynes almost every night, and cannot describe how much I want to be there; I *hate* towns and "abroad." . . .

My "wobblers" are dropping in: two more since I wrote have written to say that they *know* now how it is going to end; and I am putting one in connection with a priest. But they are suffering dreadfully, and nobody seems to realise that.

By December 6 the flatness of life has been diversified by a domestic ceremony, the return to San Silvestro of the head of St. John Baptist from the Vatican.

December 6.

. . . The chief thing is the return of St. John the Baptist's head to this church from the Vatican after being away for thirty-three years. One can't say whether one "believes" it to be the head or not—one's imagination cannot grasp what it means; one can only paw it. But here it is; brown and shrivelled and without the lower jaw; and its record goes back I don't know how many centuries. It is in a gorgeous reliquary, with pearls and amethysts, altogether about 7 feet high. We met it at the door with torches and cottas and pealing bells; it came in a waggon drawn by mules. . . .

This attitude towards relics and this psychological quality of belief in their authenticity is interestingly alluded to. Before now, he had asserted, after Newman, that he believed, but did not *know* that he believed. So here, in minor affairs, he could not be sure of his spiritual state. Probably it was intermediate. He certainly believed that St. Paul's body "without a shadow of doubt" lay beneath his altar at San Paolo fuori le Mura, and that St. Peter's was under the Vatican basilica. He as certainly did not believe in the uncanny experiences he liked to admit as thrills, now as much as ever. A singular passage occurs in a letter written on Low Sunday:

I went to see a church yesterday that you would LOATHE; but I have never seen such extraordinary things in my life—a collection of shirts and habits and tables and books and things on which Souls from Purgatory had laid their hands!—and left dreadful marks; and an extraordinary face that appeared on the wall in the church itself eight years ago, at the end of a series of devotions for the Souls in Purgatory—a really wonderful face of sorrow and pain and joy; it is there to this day—I will tell you all about it when we meet. I know it all sounds

very unconvincing and materialistic, and that was exactly what I thought till I *saw* them all. But they are simply astounding.

He was in all this, as usual, two persons; aloof critic, and schoolboy eager for thrills.

Thus, a little later on, from Naples, he will gleefully write:

This flat is haunted; I will tell you about it sometime; I had an awful night, I daresay subjective; and was awakened twice by a smashing blow on the door. It was really rather a blessed moment to hear at last the bells of the goats and cows going to pasture, and the cocks crowing.

His mother played up gallantly, and wrote in reply:

. . . Mr. L—— told us yesterday of a haunt in the rooms he had at Cambridge a week ago—when *screams came from the washstand* during the night, twice. He said the first scream awoke him, and he "lay awake the whole of the second scream!" but nothing happened. ☞ *Tell me more about your haunted room at Naples.*

He answered:

My "haunt" at Naples was of two violent blows in the night which awakened me—(on my door)—but this was after I had been told that a phantom cat had been seen by Mr. Spender, that his brother, who is a seer, had been in great terror of a woman whom he knew instinctively was haunting the place; and that a family had previously left the rooms "because Aunt saw things."

Parallel with this he can write:

I have also met a number of psychical people—Protestants, and convinced ones—of no particular denomination. Only one of them will do at all—all the rest are simply credulous, and get cross if one suggests at all that other explanations may possibly account for their little boshy things.

And he still takes a purely objective interest in his

dreams; and records them with meticulous care. I select one example. He wrote on February 27:

A good dream last night: that the Archbishop had put a marble flight of steps, with a carpet down the centre, instead of the wooden staircase that joins the corridors: and that on each side of the carpet, like an advertisement at Earl's Court, the name of a book or person that he or E. had found "helpful." [A sketch follows.] The only name I can remember was that of a book called *A Rose of Dawn*.[1]

I thought it rather ingenious and nice: it made going upstairs really interesting, and started innumerable trains of thought; and I remember coming downstairs backwards in order to reflect.

Meanwhile his spirits were rising, and in his religious life the pressure was removing itself. "May I say something?" he writes on December 6:

. . . The deadness which has been on me without a break since Easter, has gone at last—only a day or two ago, suddenly. It's a blessing. And I know myself well enough to know that it won't come back for the present. Best love to everyone—ESPECIALLY BETH.[2]

[1] Had he been reading Tennyson's *Vision of Sin?*

[2] How communicative, in one sense, his letters were felt to be, I judge from the following extract, written when he was still depressed and bewildered. His mother on her side wrote to him an admirable series of letters describing the outward events of the life which continued, though he had left it, in England; her reflections, too, on persons and incidents she generously passed on. Hugh still, if I dare surmise this, was too preoccupied in assimilating new impressions, to be conscious of his or others' most truly personal lives.

"*December* 3.

"I think I do understand about your life," Mrs. Benson wrote, "and you give so many pictures I can see it all—I wish it was more interesting; but I still think it is good for you on the whole—to have that acquaintance with the centre of things which you don't get anywhere else. I think you are very generous about the 'Seminary spirit,' and, of course, I am glad you agree with me.

"Beth is frightfully pleased to hear how much you eat and drink, and beams over your letters, and the 'especially Beth.'"

She herself contributes pen-pictures largely, and laughs over Lord Goschen's criticisms on ecclesiastical personages in the Anglican Church. "Lord Goschen is a delicious person to talk to; he plays the game of Conversation-on-a-week-

This rare self-revelation finds itself explained perhaps by another. To a question of his mother's he once answered:

There is no inner photograph to give, except that I am wholly content and satisfied. Granted a "revelation," all other forms of propagating it are unthinkable, except as purely temporary; I *know* everything must come back to Rome some day.

"In Rome," she had written, "on your birthday, and, so to speak, 'for Roman purposes!' But there is no sting in it."

He made at this period one of his brief and rather unlucky "tours of observation" over the field of general theological and critical interests.

Dec. 6.

Have you heard much about Abbé Loisy, I wonder? He is the French higher critic, and will probably be condemned; and if he is, goodness knows what will happen! He seems to be the only person who knows about the Bible at all, in France.

Dec. 10.

"Loisy!" his mother answered. "O my dear! But he out-herods Herod in his higher criticism, I believe. The *whole* Bible is an allegory."

Dec. 17.

"Loisy!" he writes a little later, in answer to a question. "Yes. If you have the *Pilot*, please read the article on him, by a 'Roman Catholic Correspondent,' in the issue of December 17. They are my sentiments. Also, remember that it does not mean that his books are untrue, but only inopportune, and that people are no more ready for them than children are ready to be told many perfectly true facts about the world. 'I have many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now.'"

"This, of course, is on the supposition that they are true. This argument is not 'a back way out of difficulty;' it is

end better than almost anyone I know. I walked between him and Lord —— on Sunday afternoon and listened to Old Cabinet talk and New Cabinet criticisms. . . ."

the front door wide open. The *Index* does NOT state that the books are untrue, but that they are calculated to produce an untrue or disproportionate impression."

When it became clear that the Abbé Loisy was no more, and perhaps had long ceased to be, a Catholic, he dropped completely and finally out of Benson's preoccupation. This always happened; it will be so with Murri, and with Tyrrell. It will be so with the many upon whom Hugh Benson passed, at first, a favourable, but mistaken judgment. They are "condemned"; he drops them with scorched fingers, and passes quickly on to some other luminous point, heedless, perhaps, whether it too is to prove a burning coal rather than a safely guarded lamp.

He stayed in Rome for Christmas, and was delighted with the celebrations. His window, moreover, a large one, "six feet by five, I should think," had not once been closed yet, night or day, except when rain positively streamed on to the floor.

"It is ideal weather again, sharpish, brilliant sun and blue sky, windless." The limpid air of Italy is an untiring marvel for him. "I was in Italy," he writes in the *Papers of a Pariah* (p. 95), "where the air is like water, and the water like wine. Morning by morning I awoke to the crying of the swifts outside, drawing long icy breaths of freshness, seeing the netted sunshine strike on the ceiling from the jug of water on the floor, hearing the rustle of the leaves below my window. There, in Italy, the morning struck the key of the day; the world was alive there, and as good as God made it, and everything was in His hand." This crystalline character of the air, this sharpness of impressions, carried out in the wheeling flight of the swifts and the crisp outline and sound of the evergreens, is what seems (beside the blue of sky and sea) to stand out best

for him, in reminiscence, against the blurred and hesitating shapes and tints of England.

Meanwhile the churches, within, were growing fearful and wonderful to his Northern eyes, with red damask, tinkling chandeliers, and astounding cribs. He delights in these, partly with the direct sympathy of a child who loves to see spontaneous self-expression, partly with the naughty glee of one who feels he is taking all possible wind out of the sails of Protestant critics. What they expect him to be shy of and explain away, he exults in. He visits the Ara Cœli, and finds two "brown friars making the crib. . . ."

Dec. 20.

It was . . . a whole chapel made into the stable, with shepherds all along the side, life-size and *hideous*, and cardboard angels descending; but it was heavenly, with a crowd of children running up and down the steps into it, and being pushed off and jawed and jawing back. And we saw the "Bambino," covered with rings and bracelets, and, lor!—nobody but convinced papists should be allowed to see that. . . . I can imagine nothing that would more put off an inquirer.

And here I insert his own rubric:

About what I want "private," may I explain my views? When I say "*absolutely* private," I mean nobody. When I say "private," = Maggie and Lucy and Beth may be told, but nobody else, and they under promise of secrecy. And when I don't say anything, but merely abuse papists and papishing ways, will you use your discretion *rather severely?* You see, I am frank.

The reader, too, will in all discretion evaluate Hugh Benson's vivid criticisms.

He went to Naples on December 26, and was enchanted with so new an experience. The rooms, to start with, had exquisite furniture, all old, damasky and brocady and gilded, with embroideries and pot-pourri and cabinets

and little Renaissance temples with Christian and pagan images, and peacock curtains and tiled floors, and all very large and breezy, with balconies, and a sheer drop of a hundred feet into the town, and the bay beyond. It is a lovely day too—no fires, and all the windows wide open, and Venetian shutters drawn, and the sun lying in streaks all over the rugs and tiles. There are books everywhere too, bound in vellum and brown leather. It is really all beyond words, *lovely*.

Neapolitan religion he delighted in, of course, and found the somewhat sober Roman cult enormously enhanced by the Southern passion of these children of God and Greece. He tells everybody about a certain "image of the Blessed Virgin, in a glass case, dressed in blue silk, and holding a lace handkerchief in her hand. But the devotion of the people was extraordinary—audible praying during Communion, and quite remarkable reverence, as well as complete freedom. The priest was perfectly rapt in prayer, but interrupted himself twice to spit. . . ."

He is enraptured with the town; not one single British criticism. Capri lies "like a blue cloud across [the bay], and Vesuvius, looking as if it was made of purple velvet, slowly smoking." He visits Pompeii, and his pages bristle with triple exclamation marks. Vesuvius shows only through a storm, as it did all those centuries ago. Lightning flashes; the clouds are black; but the tourist climbs bravely, and peers into craters, and chokes in sulphur fumes. He buys a "charming clergyman," a "perfectly beautiful clergyman, a cardinal in fact, made to be looking on at a crib, dressed in faded red silk and exquisite lawn, and eighteen inches high."[1] So, too, are the Neapolitans "charming"; the cook begs leave to come and say goodbye, and kisses his hand. Children kiss it too, in the

[1] He is standing now (August 1915) on the library mantelpiece at Hare Street, and is too lanky for grace, and looks intoxicated.

street; their probable hope of largess does not worry him. He watches a nun's progress down the road, perfectly mobbed by the devout crowd eager to salute her. "And yet," he says serenely, "the comic man at the Miracle Play is a drunken priest." Certainly Benson's quality of humour would have held firm in the Middle Ages. His eye is fixed on facts—"Your life," one wrote to him, "is all εἶναι, and not δοκεῖν; so much of civilisation is merely δοκεῖν."

He adds:

Yesterday, when I went to Communion, a dirty white cat was sitting on the altar-rail looking at the communicants, and on another evening two more cats chased one another about the sanctuary during Benediction, and were finally shoved away; because they yowled so. And yesterday, during Exposition in the Cathedral, when the whole place was breathless with prayer, a cat was proceeding alone up the very middle of the nave.

There was no more irreverence, he quite well saw, in the behaviour tolerated from these luckless cats than in what we submit to when bees come buzzing, or draughts flitting, or sunbeams filtering through that consecrated air.

On his return to Rome he settled down in good earnest to work at his novel.

Jan. 10.

I go down to the English College library a good deal now and read up Charles II. It is perfectly fascinating, and glimpses of a book are slowly dawning; but I don't want to petrify anything till I know more history. I went to see some Jesuits about it, and one of them began, just a little superciliously, "The book for you to read is—let's see, what is his name? he died in the fifties, I think." I said, "Yes, Lingard; I have read him." "Oh, well, then you ought to read one of our Fathers' books—Father Morris." "Yes, *Troubles of our Catholic Forefathers;* I have read it." "Oh-h, well, there is a very interesting, but very big

book by another of our Society—Foley's *Records of the Society of Jesus.*" "Yes, I know that well."

Then he took me seriously, and was perfectly charming, and took me all over the place, and to another library, and helped me to search for books, and told me to come again. And I giggled stupidly all down the street when I left him.

Besides this, he worked at the Vatican:

Jan. 18.

. . . The last three mornings I have torn off to the Vatican Library; and the first two were entirely occupied with red-tape, or, rather, the first time it was shut, "because it was Thursday." But such a place! with no red-tape when you get inside; you may pull it about, and take down books, and leave them about, and shove ladders about, without reproof.

Also, he sends for Evelyn's *Diary;* Pepys's too, and finds himself writing diaries in his style.

He began to be impressed, moreover, by pagan Rome. "Pagan Rome," he writes on January 23, "is simply overwhelming, and I am going to see a lot more of it." He begs for a *Marius.* "I *must* read it all over again out here." *Marius* was, however, long delayed; and I fancy his ardour for the pagan relics cooled. To tell the truth, unless a man's imagination be most fully nourished and highly reconstructive, the blurred lumps of masonry, thrusting their sudden bricks through the modern pavement, the lonely columns, and arches half engulfed, the bleached and desiccated Forum, mean tantalisingly little. An unleashed imagination is, of course, disastrous. Benson's was neither reckless nor, on this point, well informed; what he saw of ancient Rome, he saw through the eyes only of that grave Epicurean youth, brooding, like Inglesant, over a life which he took far from at its face value and (for that is no sin) most individualistically. Benson never wrote anything frankly absurd, like Lytton's book, about Pompeii

or pagan Rome, but he could have by no means reached such an admirable approximation to reality as, for example, "John Ayscough's" *Faustula* achieves. This book stands to the period of the Antonines about as close as *By What Authority* does to Elizabethan days; but its added spice of modernity points ruthlessly the parallel between collapsing paganism and the decadence of the English Church, a fact which has caused much annoyance to sensitive reviewers. Benson would have loved to use the selfsame theme; it was, for him, too elusive; but he very nearly perceived the possibility of a novel illustrating the Church's catholicism in view of her relation to paganism.

"*Marius*," he wrote on March 13, "has arrived safely, and I have flown through the first volume. It is extraordinary how out here one feels that all that was good in the old religions has been taken up and transformed in this. A great deal is just the same, both of the externals—the processions, statues, lights, shrines, and so on—and of the internals—the familiarity with the supernatural, the sense of God manifesting Himself locally, and of the saints looking after you in a secondary sort of way. It is one of the most convincing things I have ever come across. I feel I know Marius as never before, and that we should have been able to talk about "our common faith." And, if I may go on a moment, that is where Puritanism seems to fail. It has gone on perpetuating the exclusiveness of early Christianity, which was necessary enough until Christianity was out of danger of being absorbed, but is wholly harmful now that Christianity is strong enough to absorb everything else. A divine religion *must* include in itself natural religion, or it is simply a new natural religion itself—one more among the others. Isn't that the whole difference between sectarianism and catholicism?"

Jan. 13.

"I am immensely interested," his sister wrote, "by what you say of the way in which Roman Catholicism explains other religions. Of course I see that must be in a sense true because of the very fact that, on the other hand, the

reproach is that it has amalgamated with paganism and taken up heathen superstition with itself. There is a truth that lies between the two, or is rather vindicated by both."

II

It was, then, quite early during his stay at Rome that Benson conceived the idea of a novel dealing with the period of Charles II. To collect his references to it will be interesting, as showing his method of work, and his consultation with his mother, so close as almost to deserve the name of collaboration, and in this way it will be found that many other allusions are explained. Moreover, if we are to have, in imagination, a true picture of Benson's mental preoccupations at Rome, we cannot afford to postpone these extracts till we mention, in its proper place, the *Oddsfish*, into which this Charles II story grew.

Nov. 20.

. . . I wonder if there is any news of my book [*By What Authority*]. Personally I am getting lower and lower at the thought of it. Of course Isbister won't accept it! but I am beginning to wonder whether anybody will. All the same, I am madly beginning to think about another —period, Charles II; hero, a Roman Catholic clergyman (as I need scarcely say), who goes to Court, nearly joins the Church of England, and finally becomes a Benedictine. He is to meet John Inglesant in England, now an old man. He is grandson of Isabel, and has just seen her when he was a child, and so on, and so on. Charles II looms large in it. I really am beginning to have an affection for him.

Had Benson been able to *plan* his work a little more widely, this novel and sanctified Rougon Macquart series might have formed an exceptionally subtle study in history and heredity. He continues on January 10:

Please give me your advice about my new book. My hero, Nicholas Buxton, a priest, is the grandson of Isabel,

who, by the way, did marry Mr. Buxton after all. He has succeeded, so far as I can find out, to Tremans, and has no relations. Shall he live at Tremans like the others; or shall he have a small house in Kensington, with square windows and a little paved court with a plane-tree in the middle, and let Tremans to a papistical lady? The advantage of Kensington lies in the fact that he will be able to drop into Whitehall at all hours; but, again, I doubt whether the paved court will be a suitable place for retirement.

If you will let me know, I will tell him, and see what he thinks himself.

Mrs. Benson answered that the hero was to live "in Kensington, NOT Tremans (except on a visit), and the paved-tiled court in summer—lovely; you see it would be practically in the country, and he could have an oratory for the winter. Tell him I have seen him there, and report."

Hugh answered:

I have given your message to Nicholas Buxton, and he will consider Kensington more than ever with your encouragement.

January 23.

What do you think of this for a plot? Three divisions; it begins by a priest leaving a Benedictine house here to work in England. (1) The first division is his first temptation, which is to run away when the Oates Plot begins. He is really afraid of being hanged, but he stops through it, and ministers to the prisoners. (2) In the country near West Grinstead he falls in with a girl, Gertrude Maxwell (a grand-daughter of Hubert and Grace), and in trying to convert her gets very strongly attached to the Church of England, its refinement and gentlemanliness, and so on, and its moderation and quietness and church music; he also falls in love with Gertrude, who represents the Church of England at her best. He goes through an immense struggle, and wins. (3) He goes up to Court, and works in Charles II's reunion schemes, and this becomes to him the most subtle temptation of all, because it seems to be for God's glory, until he finds out that the methods used

are not good, and that it is really worldliness dressed up. Charles II dies, and James II offers him a post at Court; but he throws it all up, and goes back to Rome to pray and work straightforwardly. I think it may work out rather well, as the temptations go in a steady gradation of subtlety; and it gives any amount of opportunity for background—the Court, country life, &c. What do you think?

A week later he has the first two parts "ranged out in chapters," but finds part three much harder to "put in order." Charles II, he finds, "made definite proposals to Rome in 1662, and that the Pope answered; but his letter is lost, so I am inventing one, and am making Charles revive his proposals in 1682, and employ my hero in them, especially in sounding the Anglican authorities." He then begs his mother and sister to send him "notes pictorial, &c.," of "three or four important Anglican people, especially the two Archbishops, Ken and anyone else, whom, if possible, I can place in London." During the next week the book speeds ahead.

Nicholas Buxton at this moment has entered the King's room. I am furnishing Whitehall, regardless of expense, with silver-mounted mirrors and bronzes and tapestries, and dressing Nicholas in a black periwig, with lace and sword; and they are all beginning to talk of themselves. Beth has been accused of witchcraft years ago, and has, besides, a great grey cat in her garden, and is now looking after Nicholas's house in Kensington, with Susan and a man, and has had a door made, quite useless, which she imagines he will escape by when the constables come . . . and Isabel Buxton's portrait hangs in Nicholas's study, and he has a lock of hair of Anthony's that Isabel cut in the Tower after his death; and so on. They are all going to have such times!

The book grows so engrossing that he had "to make a rule not to work at it before dinner, except on Sundays and Mondays"; but by the end of February social functions

are undertaking to put any necessary drag upon the work. However, on February 27, after a week's depression, he announces:

Book rushing along. A nice clergyman (of the Church of England) has made his appearance—really nice, and I haven't an idea where he came from: he is not like anybody I know. A Fellow of Christchurch, Prebendary of Chichester, squire of Great Keynes; old, thin, ruddy, musical, humorous, gentlemanly, and mystical; and he wears an iron-grey wig and will shortly carry a silver-headed cane. Ultimately he is to represent the academic spirit—as opposed to the "Gospel of the poor"; and the second part of the book turns round him and Gertrude Maxwell. He carries Nicholas with his nasty seminary ideas altogether off his legs, and plays melting tunes on the Chichester organ among the grey shadows, and so on. I just looked into a room, and there he was, so I listened to his remarks.

March 26.

My book is creeping on, and becoming very psychological; and I am getting the unfortunate Nicholas into such an internal tangle that I cannot imagine how I am ever to get him out; and he has got to go deeper yet, poor man; and finally a kind of Beth will get him out, I suppose. And I am getting really sorry for Gertrude. She is so very nice that I hardly have the heart to make her end so drearily; but she *will* do it, and I can't stop her.

Easter, with its "whirl of ceremonies," intervened. "The book is hopelessly stuck. It is no sort of good doing it sentence by sentence—and my pond is empty, of course."

However, the "really nice" clergyman, "my old friend Mr. Rogers, to my great regret, has turned out to be a shallow, old, heartless man. I don't know what to do, I am so sorry. He was so nice before. These people are going along quite independently of me, and I can't help it. And another nice man is turning out rather a

brute too." A little later, and "the book is sailing ahead again." He reads it aloud to a priest, who is delighted, but foresees violent criticism. Benson, he holds, though touching "the most delicate possible point" (a priest falling in love), has not "said one word that is offensive at bottom." "He has encouraged me enormously. He sat, the other night, trembling with excitement, with his mouth and eyes open, as we skirted along the very brink of what was possible, and he panted with relief like a whale when it was over. I *am* pleased with myself." New characters appear and vanish. The first draft will easily be finished by his return. "You will be pestered with the whole of it, every word from beginning to end, over again." By May 15: "I only have about three more chapters or so. It has been flowing like a stream. It must be called *A Seminary Priest of the Seventeenth Century*.[1] I have to run furiously with pen and paper all over the country after my characters; they are behaving wildly, and most psychologically; and Dr. Ken has just been appointed Bishop of Bath and Wells, and the Jesuits are on the very edge of the line, so that it depends on your prejudices as to what you think of their actions, exactly as it does in real life. My Irish priest giggles all over at their goings-on, and says it is perfectly inoffensive, and just like them." On May 21 he is in retreat at Sant' Anselmo. The book "is just on the point of ending; only one more chapter now; and I tremble so much that I daren't begin it. The finality of it paralyses me. I shall read it solemnly aloud at Tremans, so to speak, from 12–1 and 4–5 on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays, whether anyone comes to listen or not."

[1] He had not yet experience in the choice of "selling" titles.

Trinity Sunday.—The book is FINISHED. I do wonder whether it is any good at all. I shall love to read it aloud. And now comes the labour of rewriting it; there are endless things to do at it. All kinds of people have to be planed down and carved and re-grouped. But I shall reserve the general re-editing until I come home.

He had added, too, one delightful postscript:

P.S.—Nell Gwyn is at this moment bowing on a platform, and I must rush and let her sit down.

Little more is needed to make us regret that *Oddsfish* was not allowed to appear more nearly as it was conceived.

Besides this book, he was working at the *City Set on a Hill*, of which mention has sufficiently been made above; and in April he is still toiling away, with immense joy, at proofs of *A Book of the Love of Jesus*.

"It is heavenly. It begins: 'When thou orderest thyself to pray or to have any devotion, begin by having a privy place away from all manner of noise. . . . Sit there, or kneel there, as is most to thine ease. Then, be thou lord or lady, think that thou hast a God that made thee of nought . . .' and so on. I wish," he adds wistfully, "I could get a privy place here, away from all manner of noise!"

To his first convert, Miss Lethbridge, he later wrote:

Yes; aren't those old English devotions quite perfect? They are so extremely sturdy too, and have a kind of piercing sweetness that is to the ordinary sweetness as flowers are to artificial scents. They are to ordinary devotions as Palestrina to Gounod, Pugin to Bodley, &c. &c. . . . For one's private prayers, it seems to one that with the office to represent liturgy, and with the old English devotions as material for mental prayer, one is completely equipped.

However, in April 1904[1] he declared that "I am terribly

[1] *Spiritual Letters*, p. 73.

afraid that Catholics will not care for the book. It is too Saxon—such words as 'amiable' are not permitted for a moment. But I am sure you will like it. The devotions are an extraordinary mixture of passion and restraint, strength and delicacy. . . ." A friend at Rome gaily agreed with him: "Catholics won't in the least understand them. All they want is a dreadful thing called 'An Universal Prayer,' in which one asks God to make one 'submissive to one's superiors, condescending to inferiors,' &c." ; while long ago his Anglican publisher had regretted that the book "fell between the two stools of devotion and scholarship." Yet in May he has resolved not to be deterred by either group of critics, and decides on the design for the cover—pierced hearts and roses, and "a frontispiece of the Five Wounds." You will notice that this is the book of which Lady Maxwell in *By What Authority* keeps a slightly idealised edition beside her, in the shadow of the yew hedge as she and her sister, the old ex-nun, take it by turns to read and embroider at Great Keynes.

The book did not actually appear till late in 1904, and acknowledged its debt to the suggestions and help of Fr. Frere of Mirfield. The bulk of the material is drawn from the writings of Richard Rolle, the hermit of Hampole, near Doncaster, who died in A.D. 1349. A brief account of this English mystic, whom Benson loved second only to Juliana, the ankress of Norwich, is added in an appendix to the prayers, and Rolle himself will reappear as the foundation of the exquisite *Richard Raynal*, the book which its author loved best of all his writings, while the name Rolle, curiously enough, is deliberately given, in shape Rolls, to the rather terrible hermit of *The Sentimentalists*, just as Abbot Raynal, of Sant' Anselmo in Rome, will

supply a name for the saintly hero of the later romance. In his preface Benson explains his system of a minimum of adaptation and adds an introduction dealing with the main "Characteristics of English devotions." These he reduces entirely to the principle announced by Mother Juliana when, disregarding the friendly "proffer in her reason to look up past Christ to His Father," she "answered inwardly with all the might of my soul, and said: Nay; I may not; for Thou art my Heaven . . . I would liever have been in that pain till Doomsday than to come to Heaven otherwise than by Him. . . . Thus was I learned to choose Jesus to my Heaven." From the passionate and, if you will, downright romantic devotion to the Humanity of Jesus Christ flowed directly the extraordinary intimacy of speech in these old devotions, and of "tender colloquy" with our Lord which so much affronts the orderly prayer forms of our cultured worship; Benson hated Latinisms and loathed gush; but he could not bear formality, and was sure love should be ardent and eager in its ways. Filial worship for Mary, and a minute devotion to the details of the Passion, were further consequences of the direct childlike association between the writers of these prayers and the unseen Presences. I would say at once that Benson's own amazing ejaculations, his "Dear Lord, do wait just one moment"; even his "Oh yes, Lord—just one more cigarette," were expressions (shocking, it may be, to those whose spiritual lives are lived, as most men's are, on a totally different plane) witnessing to the presence in him of this self-same childlike familiarity of intercourse. And if the possibility of this habit requires more illustration, I would send the sceptical outright to the Life of Mother Margaret Hallahan, who is herself sufficient answer. For the vividness and

sweetness of such intercourse, apart from its whimsicality, he himself refers to the spiritual habit of John Inglesant; and with a fearless trust in truth, he tells you of the same spirit dominant in the Puritan Isabel[1] whose whole spiritual life centres round the Person of Jesus Christ. *Jhesu, Jhesu, esto michi Jhesus* was long to him a sufficient prayer. The *Friendship of Christ* is his own tale of this.

His life at Rome, however, was far from being merely one of worship and of literature. Roman, especially Anglo- and American-Roman, society claimed him; and in his letters to his mother, it is easy to follow his gradually changing views upon its character.

He was initiated soon enough into the preliminaries of Roman social life.

November 20.

There is a lot of stuff here about calling that I cannot bear; it is all the same thing. We have to have cards printed, and leave them on people; and they come and leave them on us; and then you never see them again. . . . It all does seem to me a most astounding waste of time.

But his earliest friends are domestic and ecclesiastical:

I have made great friends with two extremely Irish priests, with flaming red faces and a brogue that leaves stains behind it, and a strong smell of snuff. But they are delightful; and one of them is the best-educated man [I have met]! . . . [he] knows lots of things—George Meredith and George Eliot and optics and innumerable funny stories *not* connected with ecclesiasticism. I have given him *John Inglesant* to read, and he is absorbed by it at present; but he can't hold with Fr. Sancta Clara's treatment of Inglesant at all!

Apart from these, his animals make him happy. He has a new dog, two cats, two parrots; and "The cats come

[1] *By What Authority*, p. 11.

continually to my room, especially one who climbs on to my shoulders and lies down on the back of my neck."

His visit to Naples, moreover, opened out wider experiences, and before Christmas he had a standing invitation to a villa at Fiesole, and soon enough he begins to inveigh against feminine "clacking" and that anti-Anglican gossip which always makes him lose his temper. It is in January that the round of hotel-visiting begins : already he despairs.

January 18.

I am beginning to meet a lot of people ; and I solemnly march out with visiting cards in a cigarette case nearly every afternoon, in buckled shoes and a furry hat ; but I cannot abide it. One sits and quacks about small ecclesiastical details until one never wants to see a chasuble or a relic again. Bah !

January 23.

I have made a number of acquaintances, most of whom I never wish to see again ; they talk ecclesiastical shop to me, down to my level, until I want to tell them I am an ancient Roman, and burn incense to Jupiter ; but I think they would rather like that, so I refrain.

Among these, however, he will find others to refresh him. Of one friend he writes : "She has a delightful sort of spiritual and moral aroma and an English air that was like a summer breeze in this country."

But he begins to consider that the cleavage of really ultimate importance is between "Old and New Catholics," or again, between "Black and White."

There are two classes in the Church : (1) "Old Catholics," who are still smarting from the memory of the Penal Laws and who, rather naturally, but very wrongly, think that every convert is a wolf, or rather an ass, in sheep's clothing, and that there is no grace or goodness anywhere but among themselves ; (2) modern people, who have grasped that the world has moved on, and that exclusiveness is untrue, as well as bad policy, and that converts have a knowledge of

the world outside that no one else can have; and that converts can be as papal as you like, without being latitudinarian. There is no doubt that (1) is decreasing, and that, whether they like it or not, new blood means new ideas. . . . And at present the conflict lies there. Really that principle goes deep—or rather those two principles; and they underlie the whole secret of growth, viz. centralisation and expansion, and a healthy growth *must* include both; the "lengthening of cords *and* the strengthening of stakes." My diagnosis, therefore, is that we shall get more and more papalism *and* more and more breadth, and the "Curia" and the modern thought are correlative and complementary.

Mrs. Benson diagnosed in the antagonism of the "old" Catholics towards the "new" that feeling which is summed up in the reproachful phrase, "Thou hast made them equal unto us"; while as for centralisation and decentralisation, "Don't you think," she suggested, "it often has to be one at a time?" To tell the truth, Benson was not thinking much at all just now. He was collecting impressions and allowing his soul to respond vigorously to each emotion as it came. Later he will synthesise. One of his most permanent conclusions will be, that never once has he personally experienced anything save what was kind and courteous, and indeed more than generous, at the hands of the Old and of the Black.

He visits Sant' Anselmo's with two ladies, and enjoys it. "But I *cannot* see myself quacking away at tea and getting in and out of victorias and so on; it is wretched work." But he immediately follows this up with a "quacking tea-party," at which he tells ghost-stories, and by February 20 he has hauled down the flag. He dines out, it being a Friday in Lent, with an American millionaire. He was reassured "by being shown first into a private room, where two Cardinals and an Archbishop were bowing and murmuring to one another and to four or five magnificent ladies;

but I got out with fair grace." Moreover, he fully enjoyed himself, and there were "an immense amount of very funny stories." And now the pen-pictures begin. There is the stout, fabulously rich lady who lives in a palace and thinks him a sort of Walter Pater: "You should *hear* our high talk! I was conducted gravely round the library the other day, and had to comment in a literary manner on people I had scarcely heard of." Books are sent him. He is going . . . "to make acute remarks about Paul Bourget, and pull him solemnly to bits—Lor!" In fact, he can say by February, "I contemplate myself, and am amazed, because I am beginning to quack as if I had never done anything else." With one hostess "I, so to speak, take my meals once a day and twice on Sunday"; another, whom he doesn't much like, "so to speak, goes to tea with the Pope." He meets and sees much of the late Lady Herbert of Lea, "black of the black," but whom the English colony in Rome will certainly remember with affectionate respect for very many years. Her drawing-room was undoubtedly a magnet for the devout and clerically-minded laity; but it was not least by the good offices of some in her immediate entourage that the doors of those white salons which he ultimately found so congenial began to open for him. "It is most interesting," he keeps repeating, "but very, very odd. I have never spent such a queer Lent." But he made some enduring friends. For many years the name of Princess Ruspoli, whose sons he assisted in their education at Eton, recurs in his letters. "Also," he writes, "I have met some more of the Vaughans; they are a wonderful family, all simply as good as gold, and astonishingly simple. There is a nice Captain Vaughan, with beautiful boots, and a face like a hidalgo, intensely religious." Father Bernard Vaughan was full of admiration

for Mgr. Benson in later days; he realised how fully Benson's "blossoming" was due to his Catholic atmosphere. Benson considered Father Vaughan's sermons very "evangelical," and obtained his promise to preach when Buntingford Church should be opened;[1] and it was in Mrs. Charles Vaughan's house at Broadway that he took what was almost his latest holiday. It was now, too, that he met Lady Kenmare, whose hospitality in Ireland was to create for him some of the most refreshing spaces in his laborious years; and Cardinal, then Abbot, Gasquet, "*so* nice, and English and sensible. And he will not let me kiss his hand. . . . He is giving a lecture presently to a Society of Anglican clergy, and is going to do Henry III, and talked to me about Provisors as if I knew all about it!"

"I have also," he writes, "been meeting some dangerously White people, and like them *very much more* than the Blacks; they are really sensible; and above all I had a solemn conversation in Italian for forty minutes with Don Murri, the leader of the Social Democratic Catholics. He is a clergyman, small and black and academic, and is a sort of Mephistopheles to the Blacks. We conspired to meet, privately—I said I daren't go to his house; and, so to speak, we all wore sombreros and cloaks. It was exceedingly funny. He only once entreated me to say a sentence again in English, as he thought he would be able to understand it better so. . . ."

"I have been meeting some more horrid Blacks," he writes on Low Sunday, "with their minds about as big as o; I want to plant them one by one on separate islands in the middle of the Atlantic, and let them be rained and blowed upon until they understand that Almighty God is a little larger than themselves. But I am afraid they would only make an oblation of their sufferings to St. Joseph in honour of the Fourteen Misunderstandings of

[1] A promise kept when Mgr. Benson was there no more to assist.

St. Symphorosa, for the Intentions of the Pope. I have also been meeting some nice large people, convinced papists—who *hate* clergy and functions and businesses—almost as much as I do. I sat next a nice girl of that sort yesterday at lunch, and we didn't talk about St. Gregory once."

"It was," he found, a "real delight" to meet people like the distinguished prelate who, on his saying he wanted to serve Mass at certain shrines, replied, "Oh, I don't hold with all that shrine business"; and with the lady who is "sound and sensible, though a papist; when there is a function in Rome she immediately gets a cab and drives out at the gate farthest from it; and she *loathes* clergymen. The more one is here, the more one settles down on two facts—(1) that the Rock of Peter is the only conceivable foundation; (2) that a large number of people, especially clergymen, who stand on that Rock, are *hopeless*." In his letter of May 1, at a hint from his mother, he develops the distinction between the Rock and its tenants. He still deplores that pruning off of "every shoot and leaf except the ones of faith and morals" which he believes the seminary system inflicts on its victims; but he already sees that "when you *do* get a nice priest, he is simply nicer and broader than anyone in the world." For once, he applies a principle of judgment from which great consequences for his whole life proceed.

"Partly," he says, "I think the hopelessness of the others comes from the fact that many people are unable to hold more than one idea at a time. In Anglicans that one idea is the mystery of God; in papists, the revelation of God. The two texts that correspond to these two points are (1) 'God is a Spirit,' (2) 'The Word was made flesh.' And, for practical life, I have no sort of doubt that the second is the best. Lor! it is all so clear; and I am working all that into my book."

"I was awfully interested," Mrs. Benson replied, "in all you say about the 'Rock and the people who stand on it,' and especially the two texts—and I accept fully the first as ours, though we naturally both claim each others' also. Yet, after all, 'God is a Spirit' are our Lord's own words. I think it is *quite* true that you specialise much more than we do, and divide life up, and 'for practical life' many Roman ways seem to me much more adapted. We rather take a great principle, and chuck it out, and leave people to do what they can with it; it all comes back to the two large principles of Liberty and Authority. Our people make just the mistakes and get into just the difficulties which attend learning your responsibilities, and yours seem to me to abandon greatly personal responsibility, and have the virtues and faults of such a position. Oh, how I should love to be able *really* to picture the condition of things as regards all this, before the Reformation!"

Undoubtedly Benson's charm was making for him those varied friendships which precluded so much that might be narrow and bitter in one whose friends were few and homogeneous.

"It is really rather remarkable," he writes, "the way in which we have made friends with both sides. We lunch with Lady X about once a week, where everybody is coal-black, and there is nobody but clergymen and the devout; and go in and out anyhow at the Y's, where there is never a clergyman to be seen. I wonder if we are simply crafty hypocrites."

He was most happy, too, in the society of Mr. and Mrs. Wilfrid Ward, with whom he inaugurated an acquaintance which brought him into touch with some of his most congenial friends—Mr. Reginald Balfour, for instance, with whom he was to collaborate, and other fellow-contributors to the *Dublin Review*. It was a happiness to which he often recurs that here he once more met Lord Halifax. "I walked home with him, and we JAWED."

He had, too, in April, an interesting meeting at an oppo-

site extreme—with the Rev. R. J. Campbell, then of the City Temple.

To Miss Kyle he wrote:

I met Mr. Campbell the other day, the minister of the City Temple, and I hardly ever have met anybody so attractive. . . . He was the kind of person with whom one wastes no time in talking about the weather and the train-service, but with whom one can get to the point at once—I don't mean of controversy, but of common religion. I am looking forward so much to seeing him in England. He was simply delightful, and won everyone's heart.

The friendship was not transitory, but proved, indeed, so faithful, and was so unlooked for, I confess, by many who restrain their activities and affections to those "of the household," that I may be allowed to emphasize it somewhat by quoting almost in full the very interesting letter Mr. Campbell has courteously written to me upon his relations with Hugh Benson.

It would be beside the mark altogether were I to add my own comments upon Mr. Campbell's judgment; any point of which he speaks, and which appears to suggest reflection, will, I hope, be treated elsewhere in these pages.

SAVERNAKE, ASTON ROAD, EALING, W.,
19.5.15.

DEAR FATHER MARTINDALE,—In compliance with your very kind request, I can but say that it affords me gratification to say a little about my late friend Mgr. Benson. I first met him in Rome soon after his reception into the Catholic Church. We were both the guests at the time of Fr. Whitmee of San Silvestro in Capite. I was strongly attracted to him, and from that time until his death we remained on terms of friendship, and met at not infrequent intervals. Curiously enough, however, I do not recollect ever having met him in the company of other Catholics, except on the occasion specified, although I am fortunate in enjoying the friendship of not a few. I never went to Hare Street, and now deeply regret that I was unable to

keep my promise to do so in response to his repeated kindly invitations. He has been to see me on occasions even at the City Temple—privately, of course, and not during the holding of any religious service. We have also met at the house of a Protestant friend, and I have been his chairman at three or four public meetings during the last ten or a dozen years. He has twice or thrice addressed City Temple audiences, each time with the greatest acceptance; indeed, it is but true to say that no member of another communion was more loved and admired by my people than he. In saying this perhaps I ought to add that the meetings in question were not held on the City Temple premises, but in public buildings elsewhere. The most memorable of these took place only a short time before his death, when he spoke on psychological research from a religious standpoint. Nearly three thousand persons heard that address, which was a remarkable feat of oratory as well as of clear, sane reasoning and illuminating statement. His previous visit had been to a much more restricted audience, and on a semi-private occasion, when he discoursed with equal eloquence on the Catholic Church and the Future.

His influence among Protestants was extraordinary; I do not know any living Catholic who approaches it. As he said himself, the last time he stood before a City Temple assembly, twenty years ago it would have been unthinkable that a Catholic speaker expounding Catholic doctrine would have been given a sympathetic hearing on a Protestant platform. He was good enough to credit the difference to me, and said so very emphatically in replying to a vote of thanks; but in this he was mistaken; it was he himself who made the difference. The charm and beauty, the boyish frankness of his manner, together with his evident sincerity and spiritual power, captivated everybody and made him irresistible. Perhaps I ought to mention that for some years before his death he had occupied with myself and others a place on the advisory board of the *Christian Commonwealth*, a religious periodical with an open platform—a sort of popular *Hibbert Journal*. Mgr. Benson's position there was used solely for the purpose of revising before it appeared any reference to the Catholic Church or statement bearing upon Catholic views in regard to public affairs. It did not follow that he agreed with it, but in the interests of fairness and accuracy such articles

or paragraphs were always submitted to him before publication.

As to my own personal relations with him, there is not much that I should care to say in print. I remember asking him in Rome, in the first flush of his enthusiasm as a convert, what he found in the Church of his adoption that he had not found in the Church of his father, begging him at the same time not to give any reply if he shrank from doing so. He sat for a moment or two in silence, and then, turning sharply round and facing me, and looking straight into my eyes, he answered without hesitation, "Absolute spiritual peace." No more was said just then; but we discussed the subject more fully afterwards, and again in England only a few weeks before his death. On this last occasion I reminded him of his testimony of twelve years before, and asked him where he stood now in relation to the matter with his larger experience to draw upon. "Oh," he replied, smiling, "I am quite a fanatic now." If so, he was a very gracious fanatic. He went on to explain that what to him at first had been a sense of relief and gladness in finding his proper spiritual home had now become an all-absorbing enthusiasm and devotion; he lived for nothing else. Alas, he always impressed me as living too vehemently; he was for ever going full steam ahead. At another time he remarked to me very impressively when speaking of the same subject, "No man living can understand the Catholic Church, she is so rich, so wonderful, so many-sided, so supernatural. You ask me to explain the unexplainable in attempting to analyse her life and power. I understand her less to-day than I thought I did when she first drew me to her heart, but I love her infinitely more." He was too courteous to press anyone on the subject of religious belief, but he often told me I should end by becoming a Catholic myself; in fact, he declared I was one already by temperament. I have frequently wondered whether it was this temperamental affinity which drew us to each other despite the wide differences of intellectual outlook. For I must admit that Mgr. Benson never impressed me as having any real reasons for being a Catholic; he just went over because he must, and not, so far as I could judge, from any compelling intellectual motive. I am not saying that his conversion was any the less sound because of that; to make the great issues of life turn solely upon argument is surely a very

futile proceeding; but, unless I am utterly mistaken, the intellect played almost no part in the tremendous decision which led him to submit to Rome. His mind struck me as quick rather than profound, ardent and eager rather than original or very penetrating. I think he would have acknowledged this, for he more than once quoted to me our Lord's saying about the divine mysteries hidden from the wise and revealed to babes. His ignorance on Biblical criticism was somewhat abysmal, even startlingly so; in fact, our conversations have led me to infer that his reading was never very thorough in anything. He had a creative genius of his own and a power of assimilating what he wanted, but never of study for study's sake. . . .—Yours very truly, R. J. CAMPBELL.

Mr. Campbell, in a sermon spoken from the City Temple pulpit, offered a warm tribute to Mgr. Benson's memory.

Benson made the usual excursions with these friends; one was to Tusculum.

You should have just heard my High Talk; Poetry and Civilisation, and Life and Being; and I played absurd games, Fizz and Buzz, with the children, and we told stories round. Also I told an enormous story in the theatre, about an old Roman population who had escaped at the Gothic invasion, and two boys and a girl who found their way to them by a subterranean passage. And I also descended a well by a rope, with the boy. When we got back I drove solemnly in a victoria with the girl, and she told me all about her hat and how much it cost, and that it was Parisian. She is aged ten; and we went to another awful crush—Lor! But we had a heavenly day; with two carabineers to guard us from brigands; and the blue Sabine Hills, and the sea, and the violets! ! ! . . . I am degenerating into a quacker at tea-tables, and shall probably play lawn-tennis in a black flannel shirt when I get home again.

He goes to Ostia, and attends children's balls, "all in perukes, and powder, and patches, and swords," but still finds children's parties odd "on Sunday." The Villa

d'Este enchants him; but "yesterday there was a crush, making a noise like a menagerie, at the ——'s here, who have taken an entire palace—and there were five cardinals, and monsignori like the sand of the sea—and everybody drank champagne at 5 P.M." Again, he goes to Anzio, "as usual the only ecclesiastic! as I went out and sat on the ruins of Nero's villa, built into this sea, with a sea and sky like turquoise."

The rather bitter fruit of this tree of most imperfect knowledge is set out for our consumption in the first pages of *Initiation*. There are in this, I would emphasize, no serious caricatures, and no deliberate studies of real "cases." However, the picture, for instance, of the Marchioness Daly is unkind. It is true to type; but we know how cruelly, though tacitly, portrait-painters, if such their desire, can mock. Her "under-current of acidity," her "peevish delight in discerning, and thrusting a pin through, little cracks and holes in reputations"; her reputed conversations with the Secretary of State, in which that prelate, it appeared, took her advice in every particular, and begged that he might have the advantage of it always in the future, are told of barely with a smile, certainly with no genial laugh. You will prefer the wealthy American, Mrs. Hecker, "one blaze of intelligence," hitting at once on all the right points in what she looked at, and on the right epithets for describing them; contemplating the Catacombs "in a kind of ecstasy of intelligence," and finding that "this is all too lovely – so truly Catholic; and, Sir Nevill, you make it just complete. You stand for . . . England, you know, and the feudal system . . . and here's the Trappist monk, to take us back to Silence. We're all here—a microcosm, you might say. But what I want

to know is, What does all this say to me?"—(She waved an admirably gloved hand round the tangled garden wilderness)—"What is its message to me right now? What am I to take away with me that I hadn't before?" She "always saw the dramatic element a shade quicker than anyone else," and in that resembles Benson himself, and perhaps that was one reason why he liked her, though he found her explicit statements a trifle nickel-plated for his taste. Her husband, "attentive and trim," was as negligible as the anxious Marquis; but he has his reality, as have the grave, magnificent cardinals, Daniels in whose den Nevill found himself a lion; the Italian priest, very recollected and well-bred, like "a Guardsman who has become a seminarian"; the Princess Mareschi, small, faded, shabby, the friend of cardinals, blackest of the black, of an unmistakable dignity, the replica, in Italian disguise, "of unmarried Evangelical daughters and sisters of ancient English dukes; only she was a Catholic, and talked four languages with equal ease, and they but one." With all these folk Nevill makes the excursions Benson made, to Frascati, to St. Callixtus, up to the Pincian. With Benson, he makes certain reflections proper to Rome, and, first and foremost, upon the unspanned gulf between two rival camps, clergy and laity. . . .

But if you would see a page on which Benson's own beliefs are more truly grouped and correlated than elsewhere, you must turn to the first visit of the English tourists to the Pincian, in *The Coward*. They look through the sunset across Rome, and the ancient and mediaeval and modern cities are visible, not alone in the motley crowd that throngs them, but in actual bricks and mortar stretching in all directions, broken by masses of high buildings,

such as Capitol and palazzo and hotel, or fine shafts of obelisk or column or chimney, by campaniles and domes innumerable, but crowned irrevocably by St. Peter's cupola. A very powerful sense of mysticism, and a fine grasp of the massive periods of history, seen in due perspective, are revealed in all this page, and once more, irresistibly, the sacramental, incarnational value of Rome displays itself; and Benson knows, and even the half-awakened Etonian, Valentine, can feel, that somehow before him lies all the concentrated Christianity of the past and all the promise of an unfailing future.

Benson had not been a week in Rome before he began to make arrangements for his future. On November 7th he writes that he has visited the Archbishop (now Cardinal Archbishop) of Westminster, who of course could not commit himself nor his superiors to any promise of speedy ordination, while the general impression was, that two years at least must elapse before it could be given, and that the tonsure itself must not be expected before Christmas. Hugh looks forward to receiving it from the Bishop of Southwark as soon as he is appointed. By December he is revising his hopes. A suggestion has been made that not England, but America, should be his chosen field of work. This day-dream occupied him some three months.

On December 17th his mother writes:

As to America, the thought of it attracts me, for you, very much. It would be such a new field, so full of life—and apparently, need—and the Church seems so alive there in a full and most large and reasonable way. Tell me every point as it comes to you.

On the 27th he answers:

The American is continually at me about going out there. But I think I should be too appallingly homesick;

but the work there sounds immensely attractive. It is quite odd how laymen entreat me not to go into religion; they say that secular priests in England are quite hopeless, and that every respectable person goes into religion nowadays—especially to the Benedictines.

And on January 3rd he returns to the subject:

Now, what do you think about America, really and truly? It is rather growing on me. Not that I have anything but horror at the thought of leaving England; but that exactly two things that I can do less inefficiently than other things—viz. mission preaching and literary work (editing of a Catholic newspaper)—are what are offered me. It would only mean binding myself for probably not less than three years; ordination next Christmas, and a month or two's holiday each summer if I wished it. But it would be extraordinarily expensive coming to England, and I probably could not do it every year. There is really a good chance of several here accepting it. If you said NO, I shouldn't in the least feel you were standing in my way, but that that was a "leading." I am perfectly willing to be pushed about by Divine Providence; and the thing that pushes hardest will win; and I shall be perfectly content. Personally I still feel that homesickness will simply incapacitate me.

His mother replied from Tremans on January 7th that she won't say NO about America. "Your own principles of decision which you gave me one day—of thinking—of praying—of fixing a time and putting it away—all come in well here." She urges that homesickness may wane, once he is in America. "They say, with what truth I do not know, that there is often not enough work for secular priests in England." America is suited to him; he could get back—in fact she could not bear that he should not do so. "But I will try with both hands and my whole heart to see as far as I can what is the noblest and fullest thing you can do. You can't make such a decision in a moment,

and things always come to guide one before it has to be finally made."

What moved him especially was what in his unfocused view he took for the mistaken attitude of authorities towards instructed converts.

Already on November 20 he had written:

> All that I want to do is to say Mass and make sermons and preach and deal with people; and all that I am allowed to do is to come out here and read theology that I know already, and learn colloquial Latin and go through a number of social acts and ecclesiastical functions! But perhaps they know best.

Undoubtedly they knew best! Even at the time, Hugh Benson knew they did. At the risk of seeming laborious, pedantic, and lacking in all humour, I would insist that Hugh Benson talked—when he felt none would misunderstand him—far more than he really meant. Of course he felt the curb, as do all young men full of eagerness to begin. As for theology, he recognised long after his extra year, even, at Cambridge, how sketchy was his knowledge of most of its technicalities; as for the long wait—well, it is not his disgrace that he was tempted to resent it, but his pride that he so seldom yielded.

His sister wrote, with insight almost, I feel, unparalleled in this correspondence, and at an hour when he was hesitating about the more rudimentary features of his future, and wondering whether, as a lay oblate of some religious house (had he been reading his favourite Huysmans' *L'Oblat?*) he could devote himself wholly to literary work.

> I am awfully interested about your plans. I *don't want you* to be an oblate doing literary work. And O DON'T take any place which might lead to this. The reasons are partly special, and partly general—special,

that surely you must be a priest; general, that I don't think that as a family even as regards literary work there is sufficient profundity to enable anyone safely to do that only. I always felt this about ——, and though I can't help thinking your gift is perhaps greater, yet I don't believe in any case the well is deep enough not to need constant *replenishment*, otherwise it will either run dry or thin. Symbolism breaks down. . . . I think there is less originality than power of assimilation of material and reproduction in a new form.

On November 29 he has learnt with horror of a movement to get the ex-Anglican clergy three years' training; so he feels that even if he does get two, he will be satisfied. For consolation he has "taken to a sort of mild smoking; it really became almost necessary—but I never smoke more than three [cigarettes] a day so far, and often none at all. So I think I am cured."

At this moment, then, his personal feelings crystallised themselves in tirades against the seminary system, as, judging from what he considered its results, it displayed itself. These results he considered "hopeless"—men who can talk ceremonial and casuistry and nothing else.

On December 6 he wrote thus:

One is slowly sorting impressions now, and they are instructive. Will it bore you to hear them?

(1) Everyone, priests and all, first of all have an intense faith and realisation of the supernatural, and express it perfectly frankly in words and behaviour—quite naturally and devoutly.

(2) They are also, therefore, flippant very often. It is the seamy side of faith. They make jokes that make one's hair stand on end. But they do it, not because they don't, but because they *do* believe so intensely.

(3) They are rather stupid. That is the fault of the seminary system; it teaches them their business and their faith admirably, but it teaches them nothing else at all. But when, as in the case of great directors, they do know human nature, they know it far better than any-

one else in the world. If I had the training of a boy for the priesthood, I would first shelter him entirely with a great deal of attractive religion, appealing to his heart, and dogmatic religion, appealing to his intellect, till he was fourteen. Then I would send him to Eton or Winchester till he was eighteen,[1] then to a seminary for a year or two, then to a university, Oxford or Cambridge, till he was twenty-four, then to a seminary again for three years. And I believe he would be a splendid priest after that. If I had to cut anything out of the course, I would cut out the public school.

His letter of December 20 was, one may say, frankly bitter on this subject:

One also finds here the most amazing deference for priests. At last I have learnt that when I want to put forward an unpopular view, one can always gild the pill by saying, "A priest said to me the other day. . . ." Here one can get priests in support of any tolerable opinion, and one can generally quote them. It is like the coinage: one must have the stamp, and then it is all right.

My private coach here is a popular preacher. I could not understand him until I learnt that; and now I sit and listen, and it is excellent stuff. He is very strongly on our (converts') side, or against conservatism in the authorities, and in plotting with Father Whitmee here to get us ordained as quickly as possible. Mr. —— here has a lovely phrase, a "piece." A "piece" is a kind of formality which one has "to say" in order to pass muster. If one will "say the pieces," one is all right—*e.g.* if one will say that of course animals are not "rational," one can then say what one likes, almost, as to their immortality and reason. And apparently no one seems to see that the entire question is begged as to what the word "rational" means, as I fancy there is no definition of it that will really exhaust it. And that system runs through everything. They require verbal conformity; and in all questions which are matters of opinion (not of faith) one must observe the "pieces," and then one can say what one likes. There is extraordinary freedom really. And then the other tremendous

[1] Dick Yolland, in *The Sentimentalists*, goes to Winchester.

watchword is the word "edifying." "All things are lawful for me, but all are not expedient." Theatres, bicycling out here, going out without a cassock, &c., are not "edifying."

Immediately upon this you must read that chapter in the *Papers of a Pariah* which deals directly with the Catholic priest as a seminary product. It is called "A Father in God," and professes, of course, to be an outside view of a parish priest, as taken by a thoughtful, unprejudiced, in fact sympathetic agnostic. There is excellent comedy in the first pages, where Father Thorpe deals firmly with the wealthy Mrs. Johnson, a woman who would not "bear domineering from even an archangel," and who was so important in her sphere that, when she dined with the banker, she drove both to and from his residence in a closed fly. . . . The priest's voice, "clear and peevish," was heard to say nothing but "My dear child, don't talk such nonsense," and Mrs. Johnson had nothing to answer save "Very well, Father, if you think so." And even this was in a tone both "bland and grateful." Benson's whole point is that a priest is, as he is intended to be and is accepted as being, a parent, with his moods and manners, but not, anyhow, a lawyer, who must be polite, nor a tradesman, who must be subservient. As representative to his flock of God, his authority is absolute, always recognised, very circumscribed. Unofficially, however, yet in direct consequence of his office, his voice is listened to deferentially in departments widely other than the theological. And "how strange it is that this state of affairs should be brought about through the seminary teaching." What Englishmen want, say the dignitaries of the Establishment, are men of the world, university men, gentlemen, public-school men—no others need

apply. Isolation, prayer, specialised study, lack of female society, produce, it is urged, an utterly incompetent type, sacerdotally correct, but inadequate to equal dealings with its fellow-men.

Yet precisely the opposite appears to be the case. If I wish to smoke my pipe with a congenial clergyman, or to hear reasonable conversation on topics of the day, or to learn how to deal with a refractory child, or to discuss the advisability of attending a certain race meeting; or if, on the other hand, I need a little brisk consolation, or have an unpleasant secret to reveal, or an inveterate habit to overcome, or a complicated moral problem to unravel, I should not dream of stepping across to the rectory or to the new vicarage of St. Symphorosa . . .[1] (but) I should unhesitatingly take my hat and go across to the popish presbytery, where I should find a man who had spent ten years of his youth in a rigid seminary, but who somehow had emerged from it a man of the world in the best sense, neither a large-hearted bully nor a spiritual hypochondriac; one who will neither shout at me nor shrink from me, who will possibly drop his aspirates and be entirely ignorant of literature and art, but who will yet listen to what I have to say, understand me when I say it, and give me excellent advice.

. . . Yes, yes; the Catholic Church is amazingly adroit; she has managed to produce grapes from thorns, and figs from thistles, and men of the world from seminaries. I have not an idea how she does it, unless her own explanation of it is true—which is that the knowledge of God is the short cut to knowledge of man, that time spent in prayer is the most economical investment of a working hour, and that meditation on supernatural mysteries and familiarity with supernatural things confer an insight into ordinary affairs of common life that can be obtained in no other way—unless once more Christ's words are to be taken literally, not metaphorically, and that when He said

[1] I will not reproduce the vignettes of the warm-hearted, "thumping" rector and the mortified vicar, into whose pale ear you are invited to open your grief in his oak-lined vestry on next Saturday. Benson owned that his "agnostic" had hard luck in his experience of Anglican clergymen; and the point is, not in what he denounced in other systems, but in the fact that he learnt radically to revise his own early views of the results of seminary training.

that those who for His sake renounced wives and children and brethren and lands should find themselves treated as husbands and fathers and brothers in their turn, that they who lost their life should find it, that they who took the lowest place should presently stand in the highest, and that the meek and the peacemakers should inherit the earth, be called the children of God, shine out as the light of the world, and be set upon a high hill, a city that cannot be hid.

Hugh was, however, slightly encouraged by receiving, at this time, a permission, "stamped all over with cardinals' hats and tiaras," to read books upon the *Index;* "*Libri*," it stated, "e *giornali* dalla S. Sede proibiti, à scopo di confutarne gli errori."

"So," he rather rashly sums up, "I needn't bother now, but can read anything."

However, America still beckoned him.

January 10.

. . . America seems wholly different. The priest who has asked me to come is continually saying, "We want men like you. We know you know your faith; and we want people who can deal with Protestants—we haven't got any; you would simply sweep them into the Church." And he proposes to form a Mission Society, with Father —— and myself as the nucleus,[1] and give us a free hand to go where we like, and do what we like, and use all our old methods. It is very tempting; and the parochial people will be given an independent parish at once, if they like it, and not be stuck down as junior curates under some silly old man.

If I go, I shall probably live at the Cathedral at the Archbishop's house, take over the newspaper at once, and go, travelling off all over the place, preaching. Goodness me!

The Archbishop looks a splendid person from his photograph, 6 feet 2 inches tall, very large and beaming, a convert himself, with a solid face like a butler, and enormously popular with everybody.

[1] See Vol. II., p. 209, The Motor Mission.

Of course the next thing is to wait to hear what he says. . . .

His mother felt half enthusiastic about America. At least it was not so terribly far off as India. . . . But these speculations, she urged on Hugh, were "of the earth, earthy." What she wanted was his "entire best."

The pendulum, he announced on January 18, was swinging away from America. "However, we can just wait and go along, and expect to be pushed violently by Divine Providence at the proper time. I am delighted you think as you do. It straightens things out."

Mrs. Benson suggested a final home in England, after an interlude of America, but, frankly, America is now eclipsed for Hugh by the delightful gossip that, quite independently of himself, a "Jesuit plot" is being hatched to hasten his ordination and to keep him in England. The fancy is too fascinating to be lightly disregarded.

January 23.

Do you think it is possible? We may be violently exaggerating it, but I should not be at all surprised if it was true. It is great fun, and we are being bland and innocent and uncommunicative . . . but, at any rate, it is extremely nice countermining."

Moreover, a suggestion has been made that he should go back to Cambridge, and live "with the clergyman who looks after the undergraduates, doing parochial and preaching work in the Cathedral." "But," he adds, "our relationships would be very odd with people."

Mrs. Benson, enchanted by the Jesuit plot, none the less could not feel favourable to the definite suggestion of Cambridge.

Cambridge—I don't seem to take to it for the present. I mean, I think you would be in a much better position

to work there after a longer time, and when you were, so to say, on a solid experienced basis. At present I think it would put you in an extremely difficult and disagreeable position, and would be scarcely a fair thing to do, scarcely what you would find you could do, if it came nearer, unless it was laid upon you as an absolute duty.

However, by January 30, yet another suggestion had been made. Benson was inclined to grasp at anything which should get him away from Rome.

He goes to see the Bishop of Northampton, who "is a nice old man," but

January 30.

proposed my going to Oscott (as a kind of fifth-form boy) when I said that Rome did not seem to be doing me much good, which shows that his grasp of the situation was not what it might be. I don't think we shall come back for another year if we don't go to America, or get ordination somehow. I shall try to look out for a religious house in England where I can go and live and work, but I shall let them clearly know that I propose to do literary work there, as well as theology.

On February 6 he writes that a prelate has written from America, holding out high prospects:

ordination by Christmas, and what work we like. But people are beginning to write and say that we must come to England; that we are "wanted"; that it will be a complete misapplication of energy to go to Mission work which others can do, and leave undone the work which we are especially fitted to do, and so on, and so on. So we shall wait to see what the authorities do, and whether it is more than words.

Moreover, his eye is growing accustomed to a new and more synoptic outlook over his studies.

"I am getting through a quantity of solid theology. My goodness! The scheme of it all is tremendous; every possible objection dealt with!"

However, it is this apologetic view of theology which still is mainly his: the independent prospect over the spiritual world, with its schemes and systems of ordered thought and action, and the tremendous organisation and supernatural plan, which a theologian, serene and unruffled by any thought of attack or defence, can contemplate, did not belong to him, nor was it ever, save in a circumscribed area of mystical asceticism, thoroughly appreciated by him.

A new scheme, he adds, however, on February 7, had germinated in the fertile brains of Hugh and of his friends. The spirit of Newman still hovered over the paths of recent convert-clerics out in Rome, and it was hinted

that we—*i.e.* about half a dozen converts—should start an "Oratory" at B——. It is quite extraordinary how we should fit in; we have two missionaries, two preachers, a ceremonialist, a parish priest, an organiser. Really, we should be able to do a lot. But it is only the vaguest of ideas so far. Another comfort would be that we should all be respectably educated; that no bishop could interfere, only the Pope; that we should have an entire veto against new applicants we did not like. I believe we shall draw a lot of others like ourselves. So there are a good many alternatives. We should begin with a tin church and workmen's cottages: the life is very like Mirfield. An Oratorian here suggested it. Each "Oratory," by the way, is absolutely independent of all others, and under the Pope direct, without any "General" of the Order. [. . .]

P.S.—The "Oratory" would mean that I could continue to write as much as I liked, and preach sermons, and have an evangelical prayer meeting every week.

On February 14 he says that plans are standing still. But Father Talbot has explained to them the Oratorian scheme. B—— is "the most inoffensive place," he feels, that he could start in, as he never preached there. The vision of tin chapel and cottages melts into that of a

basilica. "It would be gorgeous, with gilding and mosaics." Names follow of possible associates.

They are quite *delightful*, the most sensible old Catholics we have met yet, and extremely pious, and anxious for proper work, and not this eternal dawdling about after "careers." I loathe that word. Everybody is told to "make a career," which means that ultimately if you dawdle and intrigue enough and entirely damn your soul, you get a small piece of purple to wear in your collar. Nothing will induce me to make a career.

He sums up:

The Oratory has for it these advantages: "(1) The work we can do. (2) One will have no work that one can't do; clubs, music, ceremonial, finance, all done by others. (3) Fixity of tenure; no bishop can turn us out. (4) Respectably educated people to do with, and no danger of cads. The disadvantages are very few: (1) more difficult to go into 'religion' afterwards; (2) finance; (3) immediate ordination."

But on February 21 he can write that

an ambassador is on his way to Cardinal Respighi "to say a few plain words about Mr. —— and me, or rather not very plain, as (he) said he would have to begin a long way from the subject, and allude to it in a parenthesis." [A dispensation for swift ordination was to be asked for; the City set on a Hill was to be presented as credentials.] "I really daren't ask what he is going to say, as I am pretty certain that he will colour his story, and I should have to correct him. They are funny people!"

Further intercessors were invoked next week, but the whole scheme was regarded as a mere alternative to America.

By March 6, the Cardinal had expressed himself "most favourable," and ordination seemed probable in the summer. A consequence would be "a little more reading in Moral

Theology, in England or in Rome, and London as a probable destination."

It is the most unique and exceptional thing—unheard of . . . very tremendous, and almost frightening. It will mean for me the priesthood before I have been a year in the Church! and everybody else, since the world began, has been at least two.

Probable jealousies, however, darken the horizon else so brilliant. Next day a note followed, saying that the Pope's answer had been perfectly favourable, and all that now was needed was to be shifted to the Westminster archdiocese. Ordination seemed due in May or June, and minor orders before Easter.

"This," he wrote with an ecstatic lack of accuracy, "is simply a unique event in the entire history of Holy Church, and I tremble to think of the row that will ensue. But we are keeping it perfectly quiet until we have the last word from the Archbishop. So please do not let even a suspicion come if you are asked anything about me—and I know your powers of prevarication. Lor!—Ever yours in a hurry, R. H. B."

"One thing," Mrs. Benson wisely wrote, "I trust you won't do: receive minor orders before your ordination in May or June is absolutely and definitely promised and arranged, and not only 'favourably considered.'"

Rosy visions transfigure the letter of March 13. The Pope is "'happy' (lieto—laetus)" to help. The whole has taken place, this player at plots declares, "so entirely, really, apart from our own efforts" that it must certainly be "all right." Everyone says the Archbishop will be delighted. Father Buckler suggests the Cathedral as headquarters. A lot of outside work, missions, retreats, with "Roman faculties" for hearing ubiquitous confessions, make a picture which appeals to him. Tonsure, therefore, at

Easter? Subdiaconate in April, and diaconate and priesthood in May? Why not? "Then I shall toil, if necessary, for a month or so at casuistry."

With the imminence of reality, the more fantastic pleasures of his game began to lose their savour. Hugh was sobered, and seriously sought to see whether self had been responsible for these developments. Again he argues (March 19) that "this has all descended so amazingly from the blue that I have no sort of doubt that it is all right, and that these things have been arranged by Them as is above." And on March 26 he is seeing that "probably after ordination it will be better if I, at least, don't do too much active work all at once." His options are: "(1) Come out here again and get a doctorate. That apparently would not be at all difficult, and might be well worth having in future to quiet silly people who say it is impossible for a recent convert to know theology. (2) Go into a religious house—Downside, with the Benedictines, or Woodchester, with the Dominicans, for a year or so. This I should love. (3) Go to Westminster Cathedral and sit quiet." The doctorate appeals to him; Rome, not. Anyhow, he is determined to refuse Father Whitmee's invitation to preach the next Lent to English-speaking Catholics at San Silvestro.

His mother likes the idea of a religious house; she feels that in the less ordered life he foresees for himself at Westminster, he would be "frittered without having real work." He probably felt the same. However, the papers had arrived by Easter Day; the examination for minor orders and subdiaconate together was to be on Tuesday in Low Week by special privilege, and in English. He was not nervous. At "a short preliminary test" on Friday his coach "threw down the book after thirty-five minutes

and said, 'You know it all,' which I could have told him before he began." The examination was, in fact, "not very formidable. I stood opposite an Italian professor, a Dominican, and the professor (who is my own coach) asked me questions at an extraordinary pace in English for a quarter of an hour, which I answered at the same pace."

At this point all more distant interests fade behind the immediate emotions of an ordination promised "presto, presto," yet ever, it would seem, postponed.[1]

"After all," he writes on May 1, "I didn't get minor orders to-day. The amazing people at the Vicariate, after telling me six weeks ago that 'all the papers had come,' told me on Friday that I had to have certificates of baptism and confirmation and one or two other things! So we have written furiously to England. But we hope, in spite of it, to go into retreat to-morrow (though we can't be sure till to-morrow morning), and that I shall have minor orders in about ten days, and the subdiaconate a day or two later."

"O Hugh!" his mother wrote on May 6. "The Italian mind! They are God's creation, I know, but I have to remind myself of it now and again, when they cut across my English expectations. There! I have done! it is just possible that you may know your own business."

A week later, nothing has happened; but the affair "is in the hands of a priest who understands the Vicariate, and it is going swimmingly."

[1] Not that Hugh was painfully absorbed in ordination worries. It was at this time that he wrote to Mr. A. C. Benson:

May 9, 1904.

I read Chesterton's "Watts" about the same time [as your "Tennyson"], and I liked it rather—at least parts of it were excellent, but there was a trifle too much Chesterton. It was like a personally conducted tour; instead of, as in your book, looking at something through excellent spectacles that some one else has made. His book made me feel that he was painfully clever—while yours made me feel I was.

In fact, he did

receive tonsure and minor orders, strictly against all precedent, all at once, on Ascension Day. Generally that takes fifteen hours in Rome—three ordinations, each from 7 to 12.30, and mine took two hours. And I got them from a proper Englishman, Archbishop Stonor. I only heard for certain the day before.

The examination for diaconate and priesthood seemed due for Tuesday, and retreat previous to the subdiaconate was for Wednesday. By May 21 all papers had arrived, all examinations had been passed. Hugh migrated to the Aventine, and established himself for retreat in the Benedictine monastery of Sant' Anselmo. That superb building, due chiefly to the impulse and generosity of Leo XIII, scarcely asks that you should climb its campanile if you would enjoy one of Rome's grandest views.

"Hinc septem dominos uidere colles
Et totam licet aestimare Romam."

Martial was sitting on the Janiculum when he wrote that, and his verses are still there to remind the passer-by. Still, on those slopes, Garibaldi dominates you; the Eternal Rome is sunk somewhat and eclipsed behind the wooded shoulder of the hill; from Sant' Anselmo's balconies everything is yours. All Rome, and all the Romes, are there for you to "reckon up." At Hugh's feet almost, was the Circus Maximus, and beyond it the incomparable arcading of imperial palaces on the Palatine. Churches of bewildering antiquity, and charged with innumerable memories, rose above trees or roofs. Sta. Sabina, Sta. Prisca in Aventino, Sant' Alessio nearer still, and, visible in the hollow, the exquisite campanile of Sta. Maria in Cosmedin, and just beyond, Newman's titular church, San Giorgio in Velabro. The yellow river, at the foot of the hill to the east, linked

the centuries together, and between the limits of St. Peter's, the cypress ridge upon the Pincian ridge, the long yellow façade of the Quirinal, the little towers of Sta. Maria Maggiore, and again, the huge Lateran, was clasped all that multitudinous Rome which stood for quintessence of all history. Therefore he did not choose to eliminate from memory the atrocities of modern Roman life—the Palazzo di Giustizia that crushes out St. Peter's, the Monument that dwarfs the Capitol, and the aluminium dome of the Jewish Synagogue, a malapert and purely hideous parvenu. He had no right to refuse to see what the world he was approaching might contain.[1]

To Sant' Anselmo, where her son was preparing himself for the Roman priesthood, Mrs. Benson wrote :

TREMANS, *May* 19.

Well, you know my heart's desire !—that your service of Christ may be more and more full and beautiful and holy. If it could only have been with us, well. If it must be in another regiment, well still, if God's will be better served so. The Royal Ensign waves over us both.

All your letters [she continues] are so delicate, so just you yourself, and this regular correspondence makes just the whole difference. I have you, and your life, and I am sure you have me and mine—us and ours.

S. ANSELMO, MONTE AVENTINO,
ROME, *May* 21, 1904.

MY DEAR MAMMA,—Here I am in retreat, and immensely pleased. . . . We came here on Thursday evening—such a heavenly place—right up above Rome, with great cloisters and courts, and flowers and ilexes and birds, a blazing blue sky, and a tall abbey-church. We arrange our days exactly as we like, but as a matter of fact I get up about 5.30, go to Mass at 6, and breakfast at 7; then

[1] That this is no fantasia of the imagination, but that Benson really felt these things, I would argue from the page in *The Coward* already alluded to, where, viewing Rome from the opposite side to Sant' Anselmo, he sees in it nothing less than a continuing of the Incarnation.

dawdle a little and read and smoke a cigarette while my room is done. Then meditation (there are no addresses of any kind), and then write and read and so on till about 11.30, when I go and pray again. Then dinner at 12, siesta afterwards, walk in garden or an ilex avenue; tea with an English abbot at 4.30, then go about and meditate on anything, and supper at 7.30; and bed about 10. A really tranquil, peaceable day; and I am loving every minute of it. It lasts ten days. We talk a little, but not very much —and meals are nearly always silent.

He foresees the priesthood only a month ahead. After a few days for saying Mass "at shrines," he proposes to "tear home at once." (To India he wrote that in June he should "return to England like a bullet from a gun; and soak myself again in lawns and trees and puddly roads and villages.") Meanwhile,

The Benedictines are really wonderful—so extraordinarily peaceful. They never fuss one, and radiate a sort of tranquillity; they walk and talk very slowly; and their ceremonial is amazing, with very deliberate, clear singing. We have just had a perfectly splendid vespers, with the Abbot Primate in cope and mitre—all very deliberate and quiet. Oh dear! I wonder whether Westminster Abbey will ever see it again!

On May 28 he was ordained subdeacon in the Lateran by Cardinal Respighi, the Vicar-General, with some hundred others.

"Such sights and sounds," he writes to Mrs. Benson. . . . "I am extraordinarily pleased to be a subdeacon at last; and the office is not a burden, and I do not think will be; it is wonderfully beautiful. Our retreat was almost perfect; the one flaw was the suspense, as we had to spend Friday in telephoning and interviewing to make certain of the next day. We are being very sharp with the authorities, and have wearied them out like the Unjust Judge, and they will give us anything we ask for, I think. They will have to amend their proverb, and say 'Time is made for slaves and Britons.'"

He is, meanwhile, back at San Silvestro, the heat being fearful, all shutters closed, the courtyard full of swooping, crying swifts. The green parrot nearly went off its head with joy at seeing him again, and the cat too was "pleased with him," and clawed his "fish all during supper; [and ate] the whole of the head and outlying parts of a sole, except the backbone."

The diaconate was for Sunday, June 5, and was given in the interior chapel of San Silvestro. The weather had, anyhow, necessitated "retreat." Hugh had sat gasping, in pyjamas, a hot, pale sky glaring through a canework blind that made the trees and roof and sky look like bad sampler-work. All the ceremony was extremely quiet; "no music, no congregation." "Oh dear! how very strange it all is! But I needn't say how happy I am."[1]

His mother had already written to him:

I pray God to bless, with what fullness of desire it is impossible to say, this taking up again of your Dedication, this renewal of your priesthood in the Church of God.

And now that the date was practically fixed, she wrote:

I shall pray for you just this—the words you will be hearing on Sunday. "Grant that his teaching may be a spiritual remedy for God's people, and the fragrance of his life a delight to the Church of God."

She had studied the august ordination ritual with such accuracy that she knew it almost by heart; and, under the spell of its wide serenity, she was able to calm one of his expressed fears. "I don't believe, whatever the service on Sunday is, that it will be 'disturbing.' You will be out of all that."

[1] His one grief, he confessed, was that he would never enter a theatre again. . . . He need not, it proved, have been so anxious.

Hugh Benson was then ordained priest on the 12th June, the third Sunday after Pentecost, in the same tiny chapel opening out of the San Silvestro library.

S. SILVESTRO, *June* 12.

MY DEAR MAMMA,—Well, it is just over; and everybody has gone—and we are extraordinarily happy.

Archbishop Stonor was ill, and couldn't come; so Archbishop Seton, a Scotchman, thin and tall, with a very fine brown face, ordained us instead; and it was all as simple as possible: and lasted just over the hour. Then everybody rushed up, and knelt down one by one to kiss our hands and be blessed; then we all went down to breakfast about nine. There were half a dozen Englishmen, priests and students, who assisted, and a congregation of about a dozen more men, mostly laymen, with a Benedictine and a Jesuit among them. Then people began to give us presents. Then we all went up to our rooms and TALKED. Then the post came, and your letter. Thank you *so* much for it.

For myself, I feel just normal again, and that I am what I am, because I couldn't imagine myself really anything else. . . .

We failed to get leave for St. Peter's in time for tomorrow: so I am saying mass in St. Gregory's, where St. Augustine started from; and on Tuesday in St. Priscilla's catacomb, where St. Peter preached; and on Wednesday in St. Peter's—not at the altar of the choir—but over St. Peter's body; and on Thursday, very early before starting, in S. Silvestro. . . . The journey will be ghastly—we leave at 8 A.M., and travel through that awful heat.

By the way, I am bringing such vestments! old ones that I bought second-hand in the market, and in which I was ordained, all blazing with gold and flowers. But I shall have to leave a good deal behind me—(prepare Beth!)—to follow by sea, as I have accumulated such a lot.

He mentions the sudden death of Abbot Raynal at Sant' Anselmo, and exultingly concludes:

Best love to everyone. E. B. But I shall reach home almost as soon as this letter!

He paid his farewell visits, then, to churches, to monasteries, and to the Pope, and returned to England.

What had Rome given him? There are elusive and wistful Romes, underlying the flamboyant city of whatever period, Romes pagan and papal, classical, mediaeval, and even modern, which are shy to yield their secret, and exact long intimacy or quite exceptional intuition on the part of anyone who would woo it from them. Fr. Benson, I think, never gave himself time to learn them; and not activity, however feverish, is the way to "tear the heart" out of Rome. If, as the Latin poet sang, Rome made the universe one city, it is as true that in the city is contained a world, and worlds are hard to conquer. However, he went back supplied for ever and for ever with a centre of gravity. There never would be the slightest doubt, henceforward, whither the eye was to turn, whence the compelling voice should speak, or where the feet must rest. Whatever Hugh Benson else might be, he never now could be anything but a Roman Catholic. His fearless eye and relentless judgment had appraised all that was most natural and most human in that great Sacrament of Rome and Papacy; the more did he exult in that manifestly Divine which there displayed itself: and for him, now more than ever, all history, all psychology, had but one adequate explanation, and this was to be found in the Supernatural, which, through Rome's appointed mediation, reached to man.

CHAPTER II

AT LLANDAFF HOUSE

. . . I will pack, and take a train,
And get me to England once again!
For England's the one land, I know,
Where men with Splendid Hearts may go;
And Cambridgeshire, of all England,
The shire for Men who Understand.

RUPERT BROOKE.

THE return journey from Lambeth to Cambridge *via* Rome, as Mr. Shane Leslie has called it, was soon enough to be accomplished, but with a halt at home. To Tremans Hugh Benson hurried straight from San Silvestro, happy to be where

"Unkempt about those hedges blows
An English unofficial rose;
And where the unregulated sun
Slopes down to rest when day is done,
And wakes a vague unpunctual star."

He writes ecstatically to India on July 13: He is utterly happy here at home; he bathes; he lives in flannels; he says Mass.[1] There is a peacock and a dog; the sun shines; there is a breeze, and breakfast takes place out of doors, beneath a tree. . . . He rows the Protestant gardener for being drunk:

A religious interview, not magisterial; but I hope we both acquitted ourselves with credit. Such a *nice* man;

[1] His first Mass in England, and that on his last Corpus Christi, were said at the Convent of the Canonesses Regular of St. Augustine at Hayward's Heath. He was noted at once, the Prioress kindly tells me, for his "singular and unobtrusive gentleness."

and he only gets drunk about three times a year, and is a furious teetotaller in between. I have great sympathy for that kind of man.

Meanwhile an Elizabethan play is in prospect, with the garden front of the house as scene. There is a priest-hunt: lights are to flash to and fro in the windows; a capture is to take place on the roof. It was to represent an incident in Wyatt's rebellion, Thomas Wyatt's cousin having owned Tremans. "He walks there, head under arm."

And apparently, at this period, Hugh Benson still knew how to lounge. He wrote to the same correspondent that

The world is divided into two classes—those who like people, and those who like things. It has come to us as a good classification, at home. My mother yearns continually for town, and loves eleven hundred people; and all the rest of us love the country, and cocks and hens, and small events on the lawn like the dog digging a hole, and discuss them as if they were the pivots on which the world moved.

In this interspace of unmixed happiness, he began to revise the proofs of *By What Authority*. As usual, the mechanical labour caused the spirit to appear evaporated from its pages as he read them.

On July 23, 1904, he wrote to Mr. A. C. Benson:

My proofs have become [begun] to arrive at last, of my novel. They rather give the impression of "Hardly had this unfortunate monarch"—and should be read in a head voice by a man with pince-nez.

I have been *revelling* in Farrar, according to your advice.[1]

[1] He had an interleaved copy of Dean Farrar's *Eric, or Little by Little*, which he had illustrated. I believe there was no mood of depression, were it never so black, which he could not enlighten by the exquisite comedy to be

By his brother's advice, too, the charming dedication of his book to Mrs. Benson, Miss M. Benson, and Miss Tait, assumed its present Latin. It recalls this happy space at home, in the company of "those Three, more than others dear, at whose side I wrote this book, in whose ears I read it, and at whose schooling I corrected it." This novel, both as the firstfruits of his Catholic life, and on many intrinsic titles, is so unique that to my thinking it deserves a full attention.

In October, 1904, Dom Bede Camm finished reading the proofs, and persuaded Benson to alter the title *Magnus Valde*, not to be understanded of the multitude, into the familiar *By What Authority*.

He wanted, too, an appendix which should show Isabel in her Bridgetine convent, for example, in Belgium. Benson, however, who still more than half intended her to marry Mr. Buxton and provide descendants who should people the Charles II novel, refused.

Dom Bede has written to me concerning their united attempt to divest the romance of those minute historical flaws whose entire elimination, to judge by famous examples in historical novelists, is all but impossible.

We did our best, and I think that there are few inaccuracies that matter. It is true that almost on the first page I let pass a passage about "the bustle of the Brighton Road," which of course was a terrible anachronism in Elizabethan times, but none of the reviewers seem to have discovered it. We found it out as soon as the book was finished! But no one who has not tried has any idea how difficult it is to make a historical romance accurate in detail. I remember R. H. B. telling me that he had just

detected in those pages. It was to him more than the waters in a dry land which so many draw from the "Alice" books. He also had a similarly illustrated copy of Bishop Welldon's *Gerald Eversley's Friendship*, a book written, however, in an hour of depression and sickness, which neither claims nor possesses the eternal qualities of *Eric*.

discovered that Scotch firs were introduced into England only under James I. And he had made his hero ride for miles under the Scotch firs in Sussex![1]

The story forms itself chiefly round two characters, Anthony and Isabel Norris. With their gentle Puritan father they live in the Dower House of Great Keynes, a Sussex village in the rich scenery Benson knew by heart. The Hall is Catholic. Sir Nicholas Maxwell lives there with his wife and Mistress Margaret Torridon, a nun long since expelled from her convent; and of his two sons, the elder, James, is a priest, though secretly, and the gay, unheeding Hubert will succeed to the estate. Now, into their lives religion brings a sword, and brings salvation. For Anthony and Isabel, by separate paths, will come to Rome—Isabel, just as her lover Hubert has brought himself to fancy that the religion of "all good sea-dogs" (for he goes a-buccaneering), of the Queen's Grace, and, above all, of Isabel, is true, and embraces the Reform.

The tale can be read in different ways.

Legitimately, if you will, you may follow it as Hugh's own history. "You know," his mother wrote, "OF COURSE you *are* Anthony. Only, I cannot have you racked!" Anthony passes from the horses and dogs and hawks of his home to Cambridge, careless yet and unawakened. "He represents," wrote Benson in his notes, "the external; his inner life develops late; *ætat.* 23." "Ecclesiast.," he adds, abbreviating, "develops at Cambridge." It was there, he means, that the vision of a Church, unguessed in the individualist Puritanism of his home, first dawned for him. (Not such was Hugh's home; still it was at Cam-

[1] There were one or two other slips: Anthony before Elizabeth has blue eyes; later, I fear, they are brown! But Benson is not the only artist whose faculty of consistent visualisation suffers these periodical lapses.

bridge, not at Addington, that "theology" revealed him to himself.) Theological chatter indeed, and a parody of the Mass, disgust him. But the gallant spectacle of England, England awakening, England adolescent, stretching her muscles, flinging wide her independent enterprise, creates a complementary vision—the National Church, august in wealth and dignity and royal favour, England seen as spiritual, "the religious voice of the nation that was beginning to make itself so dominant in the council of the world." In fine rhetoric, only too modern, Anthony will preach that Nationalism to his Catholic friend Buxton. Meanwhile he sees it the closer, and its mechanism, as Gentleman of the Horse at Lambeth, in the Archbishop's household, a post received after a wasted year or two following upon Cambridge. But there, disillusioned gradually by the underside of all that State religion, the sight of the sordid machinery, the Court intrigue, the cynic sacrifice not of men's lives alone, but of truth and honour and the spirit for the better establishment of the Throne, he realises that England, having hacked herself free from the Continent, has severed too the bands which linked her with the supernatural. The Authority of Elizabeth, the ideal of England, confront those of Christ. He is the readier for Mr. Buxton's "puffing away" of the national ideal, and his substitution of the Catholic.

As Anthony rode back alone in the evening sunlight, he was as one who was seeing a vision. There was indeed a vision before him, that had been taking shape gradually, detail by detail, during these last months, and ousting the old one, and which now, terribly emphasized by Campion's arguments and illuminated by the fire of his personality, towered up imperious, consistent, dominating—and across her brow her title, the Catholic Church. Far above all the melting cloudland of theory she moved, a stupendous fact; living, in contrast with the dead past to which her enemies

cried in vain; eloquent when other systems were dumb; authoritative when they hesitated; steady when they reeled and fell. About her throne dwelt her children, from every race and age, secure in her protection, and wise with her knowledge, when other men faltered and questioned and doubted. And as Anthony looked up and saw her for the first time, he recognised her as the Mistress and Mother of his soul; and although the blinding clouds of argument and theory and self-distrust rushed down on him again and filled his eyes with dust, yet he knew he had seen her face in very truth, and that the memory of that vision could never again wholly leave him.

Fact after fact proves to him that his worshipped empire is not even Cæsar's, but that of Cæsar's freedmen. Asking, To whom, then, shall we go? he "drearily" submits to his day's "strife of tongues." The theories of Nicholl, Jewell, Harding, Rastall clash around him. Buxton's brilliant logic buffets him. The pathetic pleading of the courteous old Archbishop (Benson "fell in love" with Grindal) cannot help him; though Anthony, like Hugh, submits to farewell "interviews." More subversive of his peace than any talk, has been the gallant spectacle of Campion's death; above all, the hideous plot, concocted by an ex-retainer of the Maxwells, Lackington, the Judas of the story. Anthony himself is tricked into betraying James Maxwell, who, caught at Mass, is tortured to death's door. Grace calls; at Buxton's house he makes, under Parsons, the "spiritual exercises," and passes from the Tyranny into the Kingdom.

The coincidences of Hugh's pilgrimage and Anthony's are admitted. I would argue that in Isabel's tale, too, are elements not alien to Hugh's. While, on the one hand, her psychology is boyish often enough, or (if you will) what a boy thinks a girl's psychology to be, so in Hugh were certain rare feminine qualities revealed, chiefly in his intuitional

and passionate processes. Observe first, in Isabel, that personal, indeed romantic "love of Jesus" which was John Inglesant's and Hugh's, which made certain spots in lane or garden "sacred and fragrant to her because her Lord had met her there." Jesus was as real as Anthony or Hubert; His love made a third with theirs. From this "intense individualism" a visit to London and the stately worship of St. Paul's lifts her, as Hugh was partly lifted, into the world of corporate religion. A sojourn at that miniature Geneva, Northampton, reveals to her at once the best of Calvin's Church, and the horror of his Christ, helpless as His Father beneath the Eternal Decree which damned beforehand "poor timid, despairing, hoping souls"; more inflexible even than Michael Angelo's great Judge, who at least *chooses* to hurl his thunder-bolt. Through the thunder came no human voice, and, bruised in spirit, broken too (by her father's sudden death) in heart, Isabel returned to the Dower House, where Mistress Margaret came to mother her. Logic of intellect and force of facts buffeted Anthony Romewards. Infinite tenderness and terrible pain were to remodel his sister's soul. Isabel, like Hugh, must come to the Church "as a child." The old nun's schooling, best shown on the gentle page where she explains the Rosary, reveals to Isabel the heavenly Mother she had not dared to long for; in sweet simplicity she moves towards the paramount Obedience. Yet might sweetness not suffice. Pain works the fuller miracle.[1]

[1] Pain is a motif in Benson's life and writing. Sounded in the "Bridge" and the "Dyed Garments" of *The Light Invisible*, it reaches full development in *Initiation* and *Loneliness*. Anthony must not lack it. He sees it as it were incarnate in James Maxwell's racked body; there is a paragraph charged with intense feeling, where, on entering the dark and silent Hall, Anthony knows that, in some room or other there, that living Crucifix is awaiting him—an adequate answer, in itself, to the lusty argument of all-triumphant England; and at home, finally, in his own body, Pain will set the spirit free.

She has had her moment of triumph: Hubert (still nominally a Catholic) has declared himself; he has kissed her hands; they are transfigured for her and glowing, not with the firelight before which she holds them up, but with an inner consecrated flame. The Divine Lover fades and faints. Her heart knows itself "desperately weak" towards Hubert. . . . A fallen log rouses her. Her vision is confused. Is it this love of Hubert which draws her towards his Church? Tortured into sleeplessness, she seeks the old nun's bedside almost in despair. A scene of most accurate psychology follows her conflict and foresees her victory. Hubert will apostatise to win her; *then* she will have none of him. Later on, she will be called by Christ to renounce the truer love of Buxton, in his turn on his knees to her, and, last of all, Anthony's, beside whose death she sits. At the solemn end, as at the naïve beginning, it is the exclusive "love of Jesus" which claims her. But with the cruel human pain entered the supreme joys of grace, felt when she, with Anthony, were received into the Church and made their first Communion.

I make no apology for quoting these long pages, in which Benson's rhetoric, charged with passion, rises highest. Only one other picture of that Mass which so supremely "mattered" should, I fancy, be compared with this — Newman's, in *Loss and Gain*. During the night the promised morrow had haunted the girl's sleep.

The night passed on. Once Isabel awoke, and saw her windows blue and mystical and her room full of a dim radiance from the bright night outside. It was irresistible, and she sprang out of bed and went to the window across the cool polished oak floor, and leaned with her elbows on the sill, looking out at the square of lawn and the low ivied wall beneath, and the tall trees rising beyond, ashen-grey and olive-black, in the brilliant

glory that poured down from almost directly overhead, for the Paschal moon was at its height above the house.

And then suddenly the breathing silence was broken by a ripple of melody, and another joined, and another; and Isabel looked and wondered and listened, for she had never heard before the music of the mysterious night-flight of the larks, all soaring and singing together when the rest of the world is asleep. And she listened and wondered as the stream of song poured down from the wonderful spaces of the sky, rising to far-off ecstasies as the wheeling world sank yet further, with its sleeping meadows and woods, beneath the whirling singers; and then the earth for a moment turned in its sleep as Isabel listened, and the trees stirred as one deep breath came across the woods, and a thrush murmured a note or two beside the drive, and a rabbit suddenly awoke in the field and ran on to the lawn and sat up and looked at the white figure at the window; and far away, from the direction of Lindfield, a stag brayed.[1]

"So longeth my soul," whispered Isabel to herself.

Then all grew still again; the trees hushed; the torrent of music, more tumultuous as it neared the earth, suddenly ceased; and Isabel at the window leaned further out, and held her hands in the bath of light, and spoke softly into the night:

"O Lord Jesus, how kind Thou art to me!"

Then, at last, the morning came, and Christ was risen beyond a doubt.

Just before the sun came up, when all the sky was luminous to meet him, the two again passed up and round the corner, and into the little door in the angle. There was the same shaded candle or two, for the house was yet dark within; and they passed up and on together through the sitting-room into the chapel where each had made a first confession the night before, and had together been received into the Catholic Church. Now it was all fragrant with flowers and herbs; a pair of tall lilies leaned their delicate heads towards the altar, as if to listen for the soundless coming in the name of the Lord; underfoot,

[1] On the 27th June 1905, he wrote to Mr. Rolfe: "Do you know the glorious hour when the world turns in her sleep and sighs, and the cocks crow, and cows get up and lie down again? I lay awake till nearly three o'clock this morning, and heard it all happen. Sometimes all the larks soar and sing together at the same time."

all about the altar, lay sprigs of sweet herbs, rosemary, thyme, lavender, bay-leaves, with white blossoms scattered over them—a soft carpet for the Pierced Feet, not like those rustling palm-swords over which He rode to death last week. The black oak chest that supported the altar-stone was glorious in its vesture of cloth-of-gold; and against the white-hung wall at the back, behind the silver candlesticks, leaned the gold plate of the house, to do honour to the King. And presently there stood there the radiant rustling figure of the Priest, his personality sheathed and obliterated beneath the splendid symbolism of his vestments, stiff and chinking with jewels as he moved.

The glorious Mass of Easter Day began.

"Immolatus est Christus; itaque epulemur," Saint Paul cried from the south corner of the altar to the two converts. ("Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us; therefore let us keep the feast, but not with the old leaven.")

"Quis revolvet nobis lapidem?" wailed the women. ("Who shall roll us away the stone from the door of the sepulchre?")

"And when they looked," cried the triumphant Evangelist, "they saw that the stone was rolled away; for it was very great"—"erat quippe magnus valde."

The superb procession moves forward—the trumpets of the *Gloria*, and the tramp of the *Credo*, and the proclamation of eternal life, for which earthly life may well be sacrificed.

The heralds passed on, and mysterious figures came next, bearing Melchisedec's gifts, shadowing the tremendous event that follows on behind.

After a space or two came the first lines of the body-guard, the heavenly creatures dimly seen moving through clouds of glory, Angels, Dominations, Powers, Heavens, Virtues, and blessed Seraphim, all crying out together to heaven and earth to welcome Him who comes after in the bright shadow of the Name of the Lord; and the trumpets peal out for the last time, "Hosanna in the highest!"

Then a hush fell, and presently in the stillness came

riding the great Personages who stand in heaven about the Throne: first, the Queen Mother herself, glorious within and without, moving in clothing of wrought gold, high above all others; then the great Princes of the Blood Royal, who are admitted to drink of the King's own Cup, and sit beside Him on their thrones, Peter and Paul and the rest, with rugged faces and scarred hands; and with them great mitred figures—Linus, Cletus, and Clement, with their companions.

And then another space and a tingling silence; the crowds bow down like corn before the wind; the far-off trumpets are silent; and He comes, He comes!

On He moves, treading underfoot the laws He has made, yet borne up by them as on the Sea of Galilee; He who inhabits eternity at an instant is made present; He who transcends space is immanent in material kind; He who never leaves the Father's side rests on His white linen carpet, held, yet unconfined, in the midst of the little gold things and embroidery and candle-flames and lilies, while the fragrance of the herbs rises about Him. There rests the gracious King. Before this bending group the rest of the pageant dies into silence and nothingness outside the radiant circle of His Presence. There is His immediate priest-herald, who has marked out this halting-place for the Prince, bowing before Him, striving by gestures to interpret and fulfil the silence that words must always leave empty. Here, behind, are the adoring human hearts, each looking with closed eyes into the Face of the Fairest of the children of men, each crying silently words of adoration, welcome, and utter love.

The moments pass. The Court ceremonies are performed. The Virgins that follow the Lamb—Felicitas, Perpetua, Agatha, and the rest—step forward smiling, and take their part; the Eternal Father is invoked again in the Son's own words; and at length the King, descending yet one further step of infinite humility, flings back the last vesture of His outward Royalty, and casts Himself in a passion of haste and desire into the still and invisible depths of these two quivering hearts, made in His own Image, that lift themselves in an agony of love to meet Him. . . .

Meanwhile the Easter morning is deepening outside, the sun is rising above the yew hedge, and the dew flashes drop by drop into a diamond and vanishes; the thrush

that stirred and murmured last night is pouring out his song, and the larks that rose into the moonlight are running to and fro in the long meadow grass. The tall slender lilies that have not been chosen to grace the Sacramental Presence-Chamber are at least in the King's own garden, where he walks, morning and evening, in the cool of the day, and waiting for those who will have seen Him face to face. . . .

And presently they come, the tall lad and his sister, silent and together, out into the radiant sunlight; and the joy of the morning and the singing thrush and the jewels of dew and the sweet swaying lilies are shamed and put to silence by the joy upon their faces and in their hearts.

Considered as a story, doubtless the book is overloaded and episodic. Benson, you feel, wanted to pack into it all he knew and felt about the period in which his life was, at that crisis, being lived. And that is true; he always felt he would never write another book. All, then, must be spoken *now*.[1] Thus the Mary Stuart and the Campion pages are episodes, easily detached, especially the former. But Benson had fallen irrevocably under the spell of both

[1] Lord Halifax wrote to him on March 20, 1905, about this book: ". . . I thought at first that the characters were a little too much pegs on which to hang certain opinions, and to exemplify certain facts, and that here and there the thoughts were the thoughts of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, not those of the fifteenth and sixteenth. It was correct, perfectly impartial; there was not a statement or an utterance for which there was not authority; and yet somehow the story seemed to have been written backwards—the conclusions and moral first, then the story. . . . No one can read *Waverley*, *Rob Roy*, and *Old Mortality* without becoming Jacobite, but that as the result of the story—it is not the story that has been developed out of Jacobite principles." I would suggest that neither did Hugh here sit down, as it were, to adorn a moral by a tale, but that having his brain simply seething with innumerable visions—visions of a history seen, of course, under a certain light, in a certain perspective—he could not but utter them. They tumbled forth pell-mell, one after the other, rather than fused—for fusion, he left himself no time. Hence the appearance of a "doctrine illustrated by examples," as they said in the old books. His characters are often "types" (*e.g.* Parson Dent and his wife), but that is less because they are invented to incarnate a notion than because, vividly perceived, they at once cease to be just themselves, but stand for something further, and become significant. Thus Benson's mind always worked. Artistically, he does not disguise the process sufficiently.

these personalities, as all must who come really close to them. Therefore the scenes at Bolton Castle and Fotheringay were inevitable, though not really in place, as are those in *Come Rack, Come Rope*,[1] and though the trial and death of Campion influences Anthony, yet his brilliant logic is "duplicated" by Buxton's, his martyrdom by Maxwell's torture. Again, is not the charming chapter upon "Northern Religion" an unwarrantable interlude? An interlude, certainly, in the story, but warrantable, I think, as completing the picture of England. From Mirfield, Hugh had made excursions all over that faithful North, and had grown to love the "greens of its windy villages"; the stony towns of Lancashire, Yorkshire, and up to Westmorland; the uncompromising Halls, the bleak, unwelcoming fells, where hearts were yet so warmly loyal and tenacious of tradition. When he wanted to know what was the old faith of England, Lancashire could certainly show it to his appraising eye, and he was grateful, and here was his debt paid. Apart from this, the story moves dramatically, especially around the capture of James Maxwell and the death of Mary Corbet.[2] And it is full—like the world, where "plots" are rare, but personalities abound—of "characters." Benson's humour was to become for the most part mordant; here, how gently he laughs at old Sir Nicholas, with his Catholic yet most "Evangelical" piety, his love of shrewd intrigue, and his childlike innocence.

Often Benson shows us a chivalrous and tender affec-

[1] Benson was again and again implored to write the decisive romance of Mary Queen of Scots. He trembled to touch it. He agreed with Mr. Maurice Hewlett, author of *The Queen's Quhair*, which he admired, that the "other woman" in Mary's case was not Queen Elizabeth, but Lady Bothwell.

[2] Melodramatically, even; as when, to the question, Who captained the English ship, which, after such massacre and sacrilege, took the Spanish ship? comes the answer, "Hubert Maxwell."

tion for *old* ladies. Some have resented this, as though he could not let himself love women till he could pity them. Still, it gave us Lady Maxwell and her sister, types subtly different, though each of them so great a lady. Benson loved that velvet graciousness, and lace-like delicacy, and dignity of silver hair and jewels. Lady Maxwell is magnificent, and tender; as when she quells her village folk, furious with the parson's bitter wife, who had betrayed the priest lodging in the Hall; and then nurses and indeed converts the panic-stricken woman. And with these two put Mary Corbet, the "*incomparable*" Mary Corbet, as a conspiracy (one would think) of critics always names her, in her peacock gowns or rosy silks or muslins, with her clouds of coal-black hair, her flashing hands and restless wit and banter and court graces, and with a heart as pure and loyal and detached as ever was Isabel's. Yet Benson knew no "Mary Corbet" to inspire that picture, which is separate in this book, so unneeded by the story, so justified in itself! His vision of her must have been no less clear-cut and distinct and finished, and he never quite reproduced her. For transition to what I hold to be the true essence of the book, take Hubert Maxwell, the supplanter of James Maxwell, the buccaneer with Drake. How boyishly Benson exults in these tales of blood and gunpowder, and how headlong is the rush of his story of Drake's knighting, and how high its colour! How adequately this apostate for the sake of the pride of life and lust of eyes, symbolises, for Benson, that wanton, cruel, laughing England, intent on strangling the Spirit with her vigorous young hands. How Hubert dwindles, when arraigned before his mother and before the aged nun; how he shrivels, while she remains serene, so utterly *herself*. And how horrible is that hour of reaction, of lowered

vitality, when he sits in the Hall, now decatholicised and with all the soul struck out of it, while in his loneliness the sinister ghost peers at his soul, and the surmise: What, after all, if the Roman Church were true? Benson, like Newman, had been haunted by that ghost, and with the dawn welcomed the substance; for Hubert unreality remained triumphant, and still, at the end, we cannot tell whether the night is to break again for him.

But in Hubert and Anthony, Benson really teaches that, as in the *Æneid* it is Rome, not Æneas, who is "hero" and gives the piece its unity, so here the supreme factor is a City; or, if you will, that the two cities which Augustine saw, eternally opposed, God's and the world's, were here and now for him incarnated in Rome and England. Benson's panegyric of England throughout is quite superb. To the full he realises the magnificence of her dawn and the promise of her sun. And this England was in her turn incarnate in Elizabeth. At Cambridge, Anthony first saw Elizabeth; then, her presence scarcely led him beyond itself. Later, from a balcony in Cheapside, brother and sister watch her progress. Gorgeously the rapid prose paints the procession—a pomp of royalty preceded, though, by that scourged man, writhing at the cart's tail, his back one red wound, yelled and laughed at by the crowd like any of those "scourged fools" of ancient days in Syria or in Egypt. He passed, and Anthony saw the Queen.

A figure of extraordinary dignity, sitting upright and stiff like a pagan idol, dressed in a magnificent and fantastic purple robe, with a great double ruff, like a huge collar, behind her head; a long taper waist, voluminous skirts spread all over the cushions, embroidered with curious figures and creatures. Over her shoulders, but opened in

front so as to show the rope of pearls and the blaze of jewels on the stomacher, was a purple velvet mantle lined with ermine, with pearls sewn into it here and there. Set far back on her head, over a pile of yellow-reddish hair drawn tightly back from the forehead, was a hat with curled brims, elaborately embroidered, with the jewelled outline of a little crown in front, and a high feather topping all.

And her face—a long oval, pale and transparent in complexion, with a sharp chin and a high forehead, high arched eyebrows, auburn, but a little darker than her hair; her mouth was small, rising at the corners, with thin curved lips tightly shut; and her eyes, which were clear in colour, looked incessantly about her with great liveliness and good-humour.

There was something overpowering to these two children who looked, too awed to cheer, on this formidable figure in the barbaric dress, the gorgeous climax of a gorgeous pageant. Apart from the physical splendour, this solitary glittering creature represented so much—it was the incarnate genius of the laughing, brutal, wanton English nation, that sat here in the gilded carriage and smiled and glanced with tight lips and clear eyes. She was like some emblematic giant, moving in a processional car, as fantastic as itself, dominant and serene above the heads of the maddened crowds, on to some mysterious destiny. A sovereign, however personally inglorious, has such a dignity in some measure; and Elizabeth added to this an exceptional majesty of her own. Henry would not have been ashamed for this daughter of his. What wonder, then, that these crowds were delirious with love and loyalty and an exultant fear, as this overwhelming personality went by—this pale-faced, tranquil virgin Queen, passionate, wanton, outspoken, and absolutely fearless; with a sufficient reserve of will to be fickle without weakness, and sufficient grasp of her aims to be indifferent to her policy, untouched by vital religion, financially shrewd, inordinately vain. And when this strange dominant creature, royal by character as by birth, as strong as her father and as wanton as her mother, sat in ermine and velvet and pearls in a royal carriage, with shrewd-faced wits, and bright-eyed lovers, and solemn statesmen, and great nobles, vacuous and gallant, glittering and jingling before her, and troops of tall ladies in ruff and crimson mantle riding

on white horses behind; and when the fanfares went shattering down the street, vibrating through the continuous roar of the crowd and the shrill cries of children and the mellow thunder of church bells rocking overhead, and the endless tramp of a thousand feet below; and when the whole was framed in this fantastic, twisted street, blazing with tapestries and arched with gables and banners, all bathed in glory by the clear frosty sunshine, it is little wonder that for a few minutes at least this country boy felt that here at last was the incarnation of his dreams, and that his heart should exult with an enthusiasm he could not interpret, for the cause of a people who could produce such a Queen, and of a Queen who could rule such a people; and that his imagination should be fired with a sudden sense that these were causes for which the sacrifice of a life would be counted cheap, if they might thereby be furthered.

Yet in this very moment, by one of those mysterious suggestions that rise from the depth of a soul, the image passed into his mind, and poised itself there for an instant, of the grey-haired man who had passed half an hour ago sobbing and shrinking at the cart's tail.

Again he saw her, when he had appealed to Cæsar for the life of James Maxwell and had won his boon. That night he witnessed the revels of the English goddess, and here still the contrast stirred his soul:

There across the rippling of lutes from the ladies in the next room, in slow, swaying measure, with the gentle tap of a drum now and again; and the pavane began a stately, dignified dance; and among all the ladies moved the great Queen herself, swaying and bending with much grace and dignity. It was the strangest thing for Anthony to find himself here, a raven among all these peacocks and birds of paradise; and he wondered at himself and at the strange humour of Providence, as he watched the shimmer of the dresses, and the sparkle of the shoes and jewels, and the soft clouds of muslin and lace that shivered and rustled as the ladies stepped; the firelight shone through the wide doorway on this glowing movement, and groups of candles in sconces within the room increased and steadied the soft intensity of the light. The soft ting-

ling instruments, with the slow tap-tap marking the measure like a step, seemed a translation into chord and melody of this stately tender exercise. And so this glorious flower-bed, loaded too with a wealth of essences in the dresses and the sweet-washed gloves, swayed under the wind of the music, bending and rising together in slow waves and ripples. Then it ceased; and the silence was broken by a quick storm of applause while the dancers waited for the lutes. Then all the instruments broke out together in quick triple time; the stringed instruments supplying a hasty, throbbing accompaniment, while the shrill flutes began to whistle and the drums to gallop;—there was yet a pause in the dance, till the Queen made the first movement;—and then the whole whirled off on the wings of a coranto.

It was bewildering to Anthony, who had never even dreamed of such a dance before. He watched first the lower line of the shoes and the whole floor, in reality above, and in the mirror of the polished boards below, seemed scintillating in lines of diamond light; the heavy underskirts of brocade, puffed satin, and cloth of gold, with glimpses of foamy lace beneath, whirled and tossed above these flashing vibrations. Then he looked at the higher strata, and there was a tossing sea of faces and white throats, borne up, as it seemed—now revealed, now hidden—on clouds of undulating muslin and lace, with sparkles of precious stones set in ruffs and wings and on high-piled hair.

. . . . . .

As Anthony went down the square winding staircase an hour later, when the evening was over, and the keen winter air poured up to meet him, his brain was throbbing with the madness of dance and music and whirling colour. Here, it seemed to him, lay the secret of life. For a few minutes his old day-dreams came back, but in more intoxicating dress. The figure of Mary Corbet in her rose-coloured silk and her clouds of black hair, and her jewels and her laughing eyes and scarlet mouth, and her violet fragrance and her fire—this dominated the boy. As he walked towards the stables across the starlit court, she seemed to move before him, to hold out her hands to him, to call him her own dear lad; to invite him out of the drab-coloured life that lay on all sides, behind and before,

up into a mystic region of jewelled romance, where he and she would live and be one in the endless music of rippling strings and shrill flutes and the maddening tap of a little hidden drum.

But the familiar touch of his own sober suit and the creaking saddle as he rode home to Lambeth, and the icy wind that sang in the river sedges, and the wholesome smell of the horse and the touch of coarse hair at the shoulder, talked and breathed the old Puritan common-sense back to him again. That warm-painted, melodious world he had left was gaudy nonsense; and dancing was not the same as living; and Mary Corbet was not just a rainbow on the foam that would die when the sun went in; but both she and he together were human souls, redeemed by the death of the Saviour, with His work to do, and no time or energy for folly; and James Maxwell in the Tower—thank God, however, not for long—James Maxwell, with his wrenched joints and forehead and lips wet with agony, was in the right; and that lean, bitter, furious woman in the purple and pearls, who supped to the blare of trumpets and danced to the ripple of lutes, wholly and utterly and eternally in the wrong.

Last of all he saw Elizabeth, when, a priest, he chose the rack, death, and the service of the Kingdom rather than liberty and life at the conditions of her tyranny. He had his wish, and lay dying in the Tower in Isabel's arms.

As she knelt and watched him, her thoughts circled continually in little flights; to the walled garden of the Dower House in sunshine, and Anthony running across it in his brown suit, with the wallflowers behind him against the old red bricks and ivy, and the tall chestnut rising behind; to the wind-swept hills, with the thistles and the golden-rod, and the hazel thickets, and Anthony on his pony, sunburnt and voluble, hawk on wrist, with a light in his eyes; to the warm, panelled hall in winter, with the tapers on the round table, and Anthony flat on his face, with his feet in the air before the hearth, that glowed and roared up the wide chimney behind, and his chin on his hands, and a book open before him; or, farther back even still, to Anthony's little room at the

top of the house, his clothes on a chair, and the boy himself sitting up in bed with his arms round his knees as she came in to wish him good night and talk to him a minute or two. And every time the circling thought came home and settled again on the sight of that still, straight figure lying on the mattress, against the discoloured bricks, with the light of the taper glimmering on his thin face and brown hair and beard; and every time her heart consented that this was the best of all.

The day dawned, and the city gradually awoke. Anthony opened his eyes. She was reading the Gospel for Easter Sunday. As she spoke the words, "Magnus valde" when the great stone was rolled away, Anthony died. Isabel went out, after a while, through the keen and cloudless October sunrise. As she stood there by the Thames, the Judas, Lackington, who had thus triply given Christ over to His enemies, passed by, and would salute her, but she never saw him. "She turned almost immediately . . . and as she went the day deepened above her."

Such is the romance into which Benson poured his own life as he had lived it hitherto. It contains, perhaps, all his usual brilliance, and more, I feel, than his usual tenderness. It is as a record of his efforts and of his joys that I have spoken of it so fully.

It was felt, as might without difficulty have been foreseen, that so swiftly ordained a priest must still pause before he ventured into the uncertain seas of ministry. A house for his further studies was being sought, and the old epigram, originally launched at the neophyte-priest, H. E. Manning, was rehearsed. Father Benson, people murmured with sage nods, having been ordained priest, is about to proceed to Cambridge to commence his theology.

For upon Cambridge the combined choice of Hugh and

of Authority had fallen, and thither in October he repaired, not to the Catholic rectory, but to Llandaff House (singular coincidence of names: the house was built by Bishop Watson of Llandaff, who occupied himself with a professorship at Cambridge), inhabited by Mgr. Barnes, a fellow Etonian and an Oxford man, afterwards a lieutenant of the R.F.A., and Catholic chaplain at the University. The front of this house projects almost exactly opposite to the University Arms Hotel, and the garden at its back stretches away to the grounds of Downing College.

Hugh was of course enchanted with the house and its "big, high rooms with curved corners, &c."

"I have," he writes on October 23, "a large room looking on to the street, and am very comfortable in all ways; it is very odd to be here.

"It was a heavenly time at Tremans."

Within the house Hugh lay, so to put it, very low. "We breakfasted separately," Mgr. Barnes writes to me, "after our respective Masses; and he then retired to his room, and only emerged for meals and a constitutional."

He was engaged in studying theology in the mornings, and during the afternoons he wrote, and in the evenings insisted on reading the day's work aloud to his host, who was not always very encouraging. . . . More congenial were his discussions as to which gem in Farrar's *Eric* best deserved illustration (for it was now that he drew most of these), and on the whole this unacademic comradeship served to lay the ghosts he created for himself by the writing of the *Mirror of Shalott*. He would often appear, all his nerves on edge with his own inventions: "I cannot b-b-ear to be alone," he would exclaim.

However, he soon picked up the threads of ordinary life, and writing now became for him an integral part of this.

October 31.

I began Moral Theology this morning, and finished the Henry VIII book on Saturday. Isbister says that the devotional book will be out this week; and *By What Authority* by November 15. Now I am starting to revise the Charles II one.

Of the Henry VIII book something will be said in a moment; the devotional book is, of course, the *Book of the Love of Jesus*.

November 6.

Nothing at all has happened—but it is a delightful life, and I am beginning to make acquaintances among the undergraduates, and dine and lunch a good deal, and have also started Moral Theology, and really find that I remember it pretty well.

I go to King's a good lot, and mumble superstitiously in the ante-chapel; but people are very nice.

He rejoins the Decemviri club (which met, on one occasion, which felt strange to him, in his old rooms at Trinity), and, writes Mr. A. C. Benson, "One of the members of that time has since told me that he was the only older man he had ever known who really mixed with undergraduates and debated with them on absolutely equal terms. But indeed, so far as looks went, though he was now thirty-four, he might almost have been an undergraduate himself."[1]

Besides this, he frequents the Pitt Club, and heads many of his letters with its name; also he joined the Musical

[1] Mr. A. C. Benson has, too, the following anecdote:

"I remember that we entered the room together when dining with a hospitable Master, and were introduced to a guest, to his bewilderment, as 'Mr. Benson' and 'Father Benson.' 'I must explain,' said our host, 'that Father Benson is not Mr. Benson's father!' 'I should have imagined that he might be his son!' said the guest."

Society, and other similar associations, which enables him rather naïvely to remark on November 15:

It is *heavenly* here—exactly the sort of life one likes—except that there is not time to write very many books.

The King's Achievement was by now, however, an accomplished fact.

On October 31 he wrote to Mrs. Benson that the Henry VIII book was finished. In November 1904 he read it through to "Christopher Dell"[1] and decided that it was a great advance upon *By What Authority*, being so much better put together. And on February 13 he wrote to his mother, to whom he had sent the book: "I know it is not so effective in the last scene as in Anthony's death, but I think it may be partly owing to the fact that one hasn't the same sympathy with Ralph."

This he continued to feel about the book, and wrote on November 6, 1905, to his friend Mr. F. Rolfe:

The only reason why I am entirely ill at ease about *The King's Achievement* is that it doesn't represent really any part of my being. Not one of the characters is my intimate friend. Now in my other books they are—the whole lot. . . . I have looked at them, not written them. Do you see?

He considered, too, that he had produced the book much too fast.

His sister, Miss M. Benson, wrote on November 20 that she had re-read *The King's Achievement* aloud.

"I do think," she concludes, "it is a much better book than I had remembered. It's beautifully written, a pleasure to read, and either you have improved it very much in concentration or it was not so invertebrate as I thought. Still, it's not so engaging as the others, though Beatrice is

[1] The hero of *The Sentimentalists*, *infra*, Vol. II., p. 47 *sqq*.

really very fine indeed, and really I do give you credit for understanding the way in which women can be friends. So few people do understand, and I can't remember any man, a novelist, who does.

"Beth," she continues, "wished me to say that she thought some of the people were very unkind and crewel; but sometimes they were very kind and loving, and altogether it ended better than she expected; but she does wish you'd write a book about people who were less disagreeable with one another."

Poor Beth was haunted by the "crewelty" of Hugh's personages. She pursued Miss Benson quite a long time afterwards, and repeated:

"I was going to ask you when we was by ourselves—Why were they all so—disagreeable?"

In this book, as in the later romances, Miss Benson was invaluable for the help she gave her brother in the looking up of references and verifying of dates and other details.

The King's Achievement was a far better title for this book than what Hugh first meant to call it—*The King's Conscience.* Henry VIII appears in it, noticeably, but once, in a scene parallel, but inferior, to that in which Anthony in *By What Authority* intercedes with Elizabeth.[1] Moreover, his coarse figure dominates the book far less than does Elizabeth in the earlier romance, nor is his psychology analysed with the subtlety Hugh was willing to expend upon the Queen. His pathos is not indicated, nor his artistic, pious, and passionate youth, nor that religious anxiety which was with him to the end. Cranmer, too, is a far paler figure than is Grindal, and Ralph than either Anthony, James, or even Hubert. Chris is far less alive than Anthony. There is no Isabel, and after

[1] There is a water progress, however, comparable to Elizabeth's procession down Cheapside.

More and Fisher have been despatched, there is no one left, among the outstanding actors, save Beatrice Atherton, who is "pendant" to Mary Corbet, as everyone has recognised. The mass of secondary actors are soundly drawn, except, may I perhaps say, Lady Torridon, who is neither quite modern nor certainly in the least Tudor. This diffused and levelled interest may be more in harmony with most experience of life, but makes the book to be less romantic than Hugh's first historical novel.

Its real hero, or what gives it unity, is here no longer England, but the monasteries. That Hugh recognised this is witnessed by the change of its title, and by the criticism which pursued the volume. Catholic critics were often very indignant that he made his monks such craven creatures, hysterical and bewildered, yielding quickly to the brow-beating of the Visitors. On the other side, a controversy in an important Review was begun, but not continued, Benson considering that the manners of his opponent, which, it must be confessed, were sufficiently notorious, were such as precluded much discussion. Here, Benson felt, was but a modern Man with a Muck-rake, not seeking, however foolishly, for a pearl among the filth, but raking for filth and more filth, and chucking it about the world with his mean instrument. It may be as well to remark that Benson was not shirking when he professed his distaste for certain sorts of controversy. He satisfied his conscience most scrupulously by referring each of the disputed points to one or two authorities at Oxford whose sanction he considered final; and so little inclined was he to suppose that all things Catholic were perfect *because* Catholic, that he permitted himself to find a certain Catholic ally to be, in method and language, "far more objectionable—vulgar, abusive, and currish," than

his non-Catholic adversary. The important points are, first, that Benson simply disregarded the attacks which aimed at finding him out in minute errors ; what he asked was that his general picture should be accurate.[1] Second, it can be safely said that not even so did Benson even approach an adequate statement of the misery, deserved and undeserved, occasioned by the dissolution of the monasteries. Of this anyone may be satisfied who has had the least personal knowledge of events in France from 1900 onwards. All but a handful of Englishmen were, and, I imagine, always will be, in complete and complacent ignorance of the atrocities which were perpetrated within a half-day's journey of their homes. Catholics preach peace ; and presumably the history of the modern expulsion never will be written. Benson knew little enough of that shocking chapter of all but contemporary history ; else he could have heightened his colours, and without fear.

The story is certainly well built up of opposing personalities, and therefore full of the tragedy of twilit human wills, active and in conflict and generating ill. There is only one monster in the book—Henry VIII. One other figure, briefly upon the scene, is devilish—the ex-priest Layton, chief and obscenest looter of the monasteries, worse than the traitor Lackington. Else, we have Sir James and Lady Torridon, he loyal to creed, she an agnostic before her proper time, with head empty of the larger and holier ideals she never understood ; and their daughters, Mary and Margaret, who have appeared in

[1] It was on these lines that he vigorously attacked Kingsley's *Westward Ho!* in *Everyman*, and responded with some acerbity to an "answer" which concentrated on points of detail. He argued that Kingsley, in his superb and vital romance, unconsciously but substantially falsified the whole picture of period and individuals, under the spell of an anti-papal theory. *Cf* Vol. II., p. 224.

By What Authority as Catholics grown old in their fidelity. Chris and Ralph are their two brothers, Chris manly enough at first, and at last, but somewhat of a *déséquilibré* while a monk; Ralph, a worldling in search of advancement, faithful to nothing save, at first, to his ambition, and at the end, to his fallen master, Cromwell. The brothers pursue devious ways of life, and Ralph will be found expelling his own sister from her convent, and his brother from his Lewes Priory, of which the demolition makes one of the really tragic moments of this book.

It is perhaps interesting to note that just as Benson was writing the description of Chris bathing at night in the lake of his home, Overfield, he wrote to Mr. Rolfe :

> I like your 6.30 bathing inexpressibly; possibly you know the 10 P.M. bathing too. But yours is far more wholesome, and appears to me slightly sacramental, as no doubt you make it.

And again from Tremans :

May 30, 1905.

> There is a new lake where I bathed night and morning last year, and this year cannot at all, through reason of two savage swans. It was superb last year by moonlight; I went down there a good many times with V. and F., who were here. But it was slightly devilish too, with wreaths of mist coming off the water, and the stars and moon, and dead silence.

It is really the Catholic Beatrice Atherton who is responsible for the two dramatic "reversals of fortune" occurring in this book. One is entertaining and pathetic, but structurally unimportant—that of Lady Torridon, when Beatrice, by delicious word-play, stings her out of her contemptuous complacency first into amazement, then fury, then distress, and finally conversion; the other that of Ralph himself, who, after a life spent, as I said, in self-

aggrandisement at the expense of every ideal, at the last moment burns the paper which should have incriminated Cromwell—a useless sacrifice, since Cromwell's head has anyhow to fall, and Ralph to be racked and die.

His last words were "My—my Lord," and gave occasion to one of Hugh Benson's quite characteristic confessions. The boys of Riverview College, Sydney, have a competition which involves their writing a letter to the author whose books they have been studying for a certain prize. I cannot resist quoting from three of them:

To Rev. R. H. Benson.

Rev. Sir,—One improvement might be made with regard to the closing sentence of *The King's Achievement*. You say the dying words of Ralph Torridon were: "My Lord." Well, these words are a trifle ambiguous. I presume they refer to Cromwell, and that they mean Ralph, even at his death, was more faithful to Cromwell than to God. Otherwise you would have "My God." But couldn't you alter them a little, and make the meaning plainer?—Yours, T. M. (II Grammar).

Dear Father Robert Benson,—I have just finished your novel, *The King's Achievement*, and like it very much. There are a very few things which, improved, would make the novel better. About the character of Ralph Torridon: on the whole it is very well put together, but I do not think any person could so insult his brother, sister, and father as he did. Now, at Ralph's death, I do not like the way you end up. It left a funny impression on my mind, for the novel makes out that he died very badly, which, I think, is untrue to life. With these few remarks I will close.—Yours, M. R. R. (II Grammar).

Dear Father Benson,—Lady Torridon is as mute as a door-post, and yet you tell us that Ralph is like her. Well, Ralph is all activity, and is never at home. Again, Lady Torridon, I think, ought to start more quarrels at home, and be more lively about it, if she is to be like Ralph, and if she has such hatred for the monks. Dom Anthony is a character which I don't think you have given us enough

of. He is a charming piece of soul and body, as one can see by his action at Lewes, and then we don't see anything of him and his bright ways when he has gone, and has been banished. I'm sure he was not idle when he left Lewes.—Yours very sincerely,

B. B. (Sub-senior).

Father Benson replied as follows:

CATHOLIC RECTORY, CAMBRIDGE,
April 13.

To the EDITORS of the *Alma Mater*.

GENTLEMEN,—I must thank you most sincerely for the letters which you have admitted to your magazine with reference to one or two of my books, for the kind criticisms and suggestions contained in them, and for the gift of the magazine in question.

Will you allow me to reply shortly to these letters?

(1) Mr. T. M. has hit upon the very point that was in my own mind as I wrote the last words of *The King's Achievement*. He says they are ambiguous; I intended that they should be. Dying persons who have lived more than doubtful lives generally are ambiguous. I also intended to suggest that in accordance with Miss Beatrice Atherton's words, on a few pages before, it was possible, considering all things, that loyalty to even such a villain as Cromwell might be a virtue rather than a defect. It is sometimes better to be faithful to a villain, in an indifferent matter, than to be faithful to nobody.

Finally, if I am asked whether I meant the words "My Lord" to refer to Cromwell or to Almighty God, I can only answer that I am as doubtful as Mr. M. R. I wish, however, it was untrue to life to make an evil liver die evilly—though I don't say that Ralph did.

(2) Mr. M. R. objects to Ralph's villainy towards his family. So do I, very much. But—well, it is better to be an optimist than a pessimist. It is optimism that converts the world. I will try to correct my pessimistic tendencies.

(3) Mr. B. B. objects that Ralph and his mother, who are said to be alike, are not really so. But people's attitudes towards life, and their characters, can be very much alike even though they express them quite differently. A green butterfly is more really like a brown one, than a brown one is like a dead leaf. Please consider this, Mr. B.

No, indeed, Dom Anthony was not idle when he left Lewes; but I simply hadn't time to go after him abroad. He only succeeded with great difficulty in escaping himself. I didn't like to take the risk of going with him; and, as I say, there wasn't time.—Gentlemen, I am yours faithfully, ROBERT HUGH BENSON.

P.S.—I trust all the other authors to whom you have written will answer also. [The other authors were Scott, Dickens, and Coleridge.]

Though the book has fewer set scenes, perhaps, fewer episodes (the Pilgrimage of Grace is unnecessarily episodic, just like "Northern Religion" in the earlier book), less rhetoric, and more introspection of a slightly neurotic type (Chris does not really master us, and Ralph's soul moves jerkily), there is more even colour and progression in it which, had Benson been destined ever to give himself due time for his work, might have fulfilled its promise of real constructive eminence. As it is, Anne Boleyn, laughing frantically up to her death's eve in the very Tower room where she had spent the eve of her coronation, is an unforgettable vignette; the scenes with More at Chelsea and with Fisher, with Mary Torridon—in need, at first, of her convent as pathetically as ever was Bazin's *Isolée*—make episodes of true drama.

Hugh spent Christmas at Tremans, for which he had been preparing charades, "with a large collection of masks." He there told his mother that he wanted to join, if possible, at Magdalene, where about this time his brother was coming to take up residence. Already in November he had thought of establishing himself at any rate at Cambridge.

November 28.

I am beginning to think vaguely of coming here permanently. There is an immense amount to be done. But it is only very vague.

To Miss E. Kemble Martin he repeated :

There is an immense amount to do, if one only has sufficient tact, as all sorts of people are interested in the Church, and wish to hear about it. There is no need to go out of one's way to seek them, even if it were advisable, which it is not.

The Magdalene plan was judged, however, indiscreet, if not impracticable, at least for the present ; and he soon offered himself to Mgr. Scott as possible curate at the Catholic rectory. Financial considerations for the moment put this plan too into abeyance.[1]

That he did not actually go to Magdalene did not, however, stand in the way of much intercourse between him and his elder brother. A new friendship was inaugurated, unusual, surely, between brothers who have reached middle-age without any such sense of close comradeship having declared itself. These, also, it might have been judged, had not recently been separated by a spiritual schism, more profound than any which existed in their younger years. However, this friendship did but become the easier and more expansive as time went on, and the slight sense of being—in the background, somehow —at war, vanished. Others, in rather surprising numbers, have noticed, in the later years, Hugh's increased gentleness and power of making allowances without sacrifice of principle.

From Rome Hugh had written to his mother, and in all the singular circumstances I do not hesitate long to quote these fragments :

I had a long letter from Arthur, so nice, this morning,

[1] He was very pleased by an invitation to take a mission at Downside. Trust was thus displayed in him, and that the request came from religious, and these the Benedictines, pleased him yet more. But he had to refuse.

about a boy I wrote to him about who wants to get into Eton next year. I like Arthur.

And now in 1905 he will say :

Arthur comes up to-day ; and I am dining with him to-night. He is *delightful.*

And later on to a friend :

Yes, E. F. B. is a cheerful bird. And A. C. B. is a bird of paradise. He now tells me that I may have a private sitting-room and bedroom in his new house whenever I care to come ; and SILENCE for nineteen hours out of twenty-four. He has also, so to speak, made me a Fellow of Magdalene, and tells me to dine there at his expense whenever I want to, whether he is there or not. What a heavenly man !

This was after Mr. A. C. Benson had taken, for a short period, Hinton Hall, with its shooting of some eight hundred acres in the Ely flats.

Of this, Hugh wrote on March 24, 1906 :

[Hinton Hall] really is quite heavenly, delightful inside—and no human habitation in sight outside. It struck me, morbidly perhaps, but also complimentarily, that it would be an ideal place to be ill in. It would be cheerful and interesting ; and one would know that all the rest of the house was pleased and smiling too, and that nobody would come and bother, or make a noise, or ring the bell. I don't think one could pay a higher compliment to any place, unless one said one would like to have been brought up there as a child ; and that also I felt.

As yet, however, Mr. Benson had only the hospitality of Magdalene to offer to his brother ; Hugh availed himself freely of it, and often went there to dine, passing beneath the old clock with its significant motto : *Garde ta Foy.* It was with offered fancies such as these that his ingenious brain loved to play. Mr. A. C. Benson on his side enjoyed

coming to Llandaff House, and besides this, he writes in *Hugh:*

We arranged always to walk together on Sunday afternoons. As an old member of King's College, I had a key of the garden there, in the Backs, and a pass-key of the college gates, which were locked on Sunday during the chapel service. We always went and walked about that beautiful garden with its winding paths, or sat out in the bowling-green. Then we generally let ourselves into the college grounds, and went up to the south porch of the chapel, where we could hear the service proceeding within. I can remember Hugh saying, as the Psalms came to an end: "Anglican double chants, how comfortable and delicious, and how entirely irreligious!"

"It fails one," he said, on another occasion, of academical religion, "if one is ill." Æsthetically, this worship of universities and cathedrals was very nearly his ideal.

The morality play of *Everyman* was at this time revealing to him new possibilities for a Catholic author. He went, too, to Oxford for the *Clouds,* and made a really affectionate acquaintance with Mr. F. F. Urquhart of Balliol.[1] Mr. Urquhart introduced him later on to a small Catholic debating club, now defunct, and suggested him for Mr. Wilfrid Ward's Westminster Dining Society, to which he was in fact elected. He read there a paper on Personality on March 29, 1905, of which there is no need to give any details. His views on this and allied subjects are discussed below. On April 5, he wrote to Mr. Urquhart:

April 5.

I should immensely like to go to Stonyhurst some day; but at present, I am afraid, I am as full up as I can be.

[1] He found Mr. Urquhart "charming, and extraordinarily clever, and very Oxfordy." By this he did not allude to what he called the Axfahd manner, which was complicated by ecclesiasticism, and involved pats and pawings and brotherly embraces which reduced his nerves to chaotic exasperation.

I read its history a few years ago with great pleasure. Thank you for what you tell me about *The Light Invisible*.[1] It is good to hear of things like that. We had a good dinner last week at the Dining Society; Lord Llandaff was a little caustic, as usual; and Balfour[2] sat soundly on Fr. P—— for saying that theologians talked a different language to scientists. "That is my point," he said; "it is what I complain of." I was so much interested to hear of Fr. Tyrrell. He was kind to me in correspondence three years ago; when I was "upset." . . . And I hear a lot about him from various [people]; and read his books over and over again.

I always recommend him as an antidote to Mallock, they are so very much alike in shrewdness and subtlety.

Having accomplished *The King's Achievement*, it was on Queen Mary Tudor he now concentrated.

LLANDAFF HOUSE, CAMBRIDGE,
February 15 [1905].

Now I want to begin on Queen Mary. A great many reviews have taunted me with having avoided that side, and I want much to show that a case can be made. Mary is one of the most pathetic figures in history, I think—snubbed, misunderstood, soured by trouble, with a conscience and convictions such as few have.

March 6 [1905].

I am on the verge of the Mary Book, exactly as on the edge of a pond on a cold day—dawdling over trifles, and meaning to plunge, and then thinking I must do something else first—it is an appalling undertaking.

Three distractions here occurred—he discovers a cold-water cure:[3] the Bishop of Northampton accepts him for his diocese; and there is a University discussion on the suppression of Greek at the entrance examination. After

[1] This was, that it had interested and comforted the last days of a young Jesuit who had recently died.

[2] The late Mr. Reginald Balfour.

[3] It was some dyspepsia of the sort here implied, I imagine, which made him create a sensation by fainting in King's Combination Room after dinner on Nov. 18, 1904.

it he exclaims: "I did not think there were so many clergymen in the world! . . ." In consequence he found heart to resume his task.

November 13.

I have begun "Mary" with dreadful fear. If only I can do it right, it will be by far the best thing I have done; but it is difficult beyond belief. I am telling half from my hero's point of view, and half from Mary's—mixing them up. My man's is easy enough; but the Queen's is fearful! I have to know every conceivable detail. I have already found out that she ate quantities of meat for breakfast.

The book is therefore to be a psychological study rather than a romance with an ordered plot, and will involve, in the main, the Queen herself, and Master Guy Manton, a gentleman of her court.

April 30.

Queen Mary is getting along. I have emended the first part very much, along the kind of lines that you and Maggie suggested, and have made Guy ever so much more interesting. All his hardness has become intentional instead of natural. He *means* to be hard now, because he sees he cannot make way without it. The burning of Latimer and Ridley is now his crisis, in which he deliberately chokes down his pity; he then becomes a devil in consequence, and doesn't recover until the end of the book, when his pity for Mary conquers him. How is that? Don't you think that an ingenious solution?

He assured Miss E. K. Martin:

I am going to take immense pains—much more than with *By What Authority*—in order to *make* people see how unjustly they have treated her in the past. But that is a proud and high ambition.

And later:

Queen Mary is going along nicely. I think she will be good; but for the last day or two I have stuck in a furious brawl, and my people wait hour after hour with uplifted weapons, and I can't let them put them down. At

this moment someone is pausing with clenched fists and a savage expression.

It is odd how these things run—apparently independent of one's will and intellect.

This was often so with him. Later on, when he tried to rewrite the Charles II book, he complained:

August 10, 1905.

I am dingily rewriting an old book. What weary work that is! . . . This is the fourth time of rewriting. . . . Also I am doing about eleven thousand other things simultaneously. . . . When I write for the first time my characters do their own business and say their own words entirely. Then I have to select them in rewriting, and have an eye on the readers, and it is just exactly this that I HATE. *E.g.* in my present book two people have a long technical interview. Now they *did* have it, and they said just those things. But the public would be bored by listening; I can't utter a word. So I have to refuse to be in the room with them, and the result is that pages of labour disappear, and we are left waiting outside with a dull clergyman until they have done. Now, how heart-breaking! Because it is really very interesting indeed, and all perfectly true.

By May 6 he made a disastrous discovery:

I am discovering the secret of economy of time, which is always to do two things simultaneously. I read Queen Mary and *Hadrian VII*[1] while I eat, dress, undress, go from room to room, and combine walking always with the things I have got to do. It is simply delightful.

Many readers have found *The Queen's Tragedy* a difficult book to like. At a first reading, Benson, who could do, no doubt, without plots, does seem to have, as it were, just chucked down his psychological impressions in slabs, sandwiched between page after page of pageantry. The pageantry of the book is, one may confess, superb. There are unforgettable scenes: the palaces, with Mary's pre-

[1] Of *Hadrian VII* I shall say a word below, Vol. II, p. 94.

sence so strongly felt even when unseen; the episode of Philip's coming to Winchester; the preparation of the Cathedral on the night before the marriage; the marriage itself (seen, as Benson loves to have his great moments viewed, imperfectly, from an angle, by a secondary personage often—in this instance by Jack Norris, the easy-going gentleman-usher: later, Mary herself will view the return of the Benedictines to Westminster from her private place above King Edward's shrine); above all, the reconciliation of England with the Holy See.

But the psychology itself, on which in this book we are meant to concentrate, somehow fails to convince in all save one all-important instance. To tell the truth, Benson was applying a principle which later on he formulated in the following short conversation:

"Why don't you take more trouble over your novels?" a friend once asked him. "If a thing's worth doing at all, it's worth doing well."

"I totally disagree," he energetically exclaimed. "There are lots of things which are worth doing, but aren't in the least worth doing *well*."

He proceeded to explain that in his novels he wrote only to make one point, to "help" one reader, or perhaps one group of readers. If that point were but made, and those readers touched, "tout le reste n'est que littérature," and might be allowed to slide. How far an artist could permit himself thus to speak we may have an occasion of asking later on. Suffice it here to say that he wanted in this book, to which its title gives the key, to paint a spiritually convincing portrait of Queen Mary, and as for construction, development, climax, and the like, at best all *that* was secondary. He did not bother about it, despite his determination to take such especially "great pains." Those

all were concentrated on the central figure. Magdalene Dacre,[1] at first so charming, then so puzzlingly selfish and ineffective; Jane Dormer, just ordinarily sweet, then with such hinted depths of spiritual intelligence; Jack Norris, jolly and all too easy-going, and talkative, too often, in his cups; Dick Kearsley, that seeming-sour, most honourable and loyal friend—all these, who with care might have been developed into real personages to live in literature, for each of them we are beginning to love, and feel ourselves defrauded as they vanish—are carelessly sketched in, treasures tossed out by a millionaire, too rich to care, adequately, for his own beautiful gift.[2] In them too is visible that element of noisiness in description, which is his who wishes to make, quickly, a strong effect, without the patience to accumulate the small touches which shall at last produce it forcefully. These people in the "Mary Book" are all the time "snapping," "snarling," "hissing," even "barking":[3] they bite their lips, and bare their teeth, and they are always at it. Now, is not this hurry and buffeting; are we not pushed about—not imperceptibly led forward, with infrequent shocks just to make us realise the distance we have travelled or the goal we have reached? Here is, perhaps, an impressionist hurling down of colours side by side which is not really craftsmanship, but violence in place of strength, and audacity instead of courage.

But what about Guy Manton? Assisted by the letter quoted above I would argue that Hugh Benson changed his mind about him in the middle of his tale. Guy was

[1] Magdalene Dacre, it appears, was in reality married before Queen Mary's death.

[2] As for the Reformers, Ridley and Latimer, we simply cannot tell what we are supposed to think of them and of their martyrdom. Are they caricatures? contemptible? pathetic? genuinely tragic? Perhaps Benson himself was torn two ways in their regard. Perhaps he had just not made up his mind.

[3] In *The Necromancers* we shall have a Lady Laura who *mews*.

not at first meant to be a psychological study at all. However, he certainly became one, and that, a study in *hardness*. Now, why did Hugh do this? Nothing would be more tiresome than to insist that in each of his chief characters Hugh reproduced one side at least of himself. Yet I will be bold to say that there is one passage which might very well have been written about Hugh by an outside unsympathetic observer just then at Cambridge:

> [Guy] was a strange creature; they could understand neither his tenderness nor his spasms of rage. He had made himself ridiculous more than once in his friendships by showing a compassion for queer persons they could not comprehend; and he had made himself a little terrible, too, half a dozen times in his furies against disloyalty, and his contempt of what they considered academic finesse.

However, just at this time Hugh was going through some quite singular experiences connected with friendship and the duties of loyalty, and was likely to be, for some time, increasingly misunderstood in this and other points. That his character contained an element of hardness, which he sometimes deplored, and at other times would cultivate, but always recognised, few should really find it hard to recognise along with him. And just now the loneliness, and the necessity of hardening one's self to deal with positive rebuff no less than negative neglect coming from most widely diverse quarters, were prominent topics in his consciousness. But it will be easier to observe them separately, and later on in his life, than to try to study him in the person of Guy Manton; not only, I repeat, because the description of Manton is unequally sketched in, is properly worked out neither at the outset of his hardening, in its development and as it were crystallisation, and least of all in its break-up and disintegration, but because

Hugh himself, in character, was so far from his full self-realisation.

But Hugh had set to work to draw, primarily, a picture of Queen Mary, and knew how difficult his task was:

> She is pious; she is zealous; she has a will of her own; she is cold; she is hot; she is miserly; she is liberal; she has a sad soul and a merry dress; she is silent; she can speak like an orator, for I heard her at the Guildhall in February, and she set my heart afire; then she put it out again next day by her coldness.

Could Hugh Benson "make a woman out of that"? Well, somehow, he succeeded, I believe, despite the very many Catholic critics who felt, no doubt, that the Catholic Queen ought to have been pictured as more attractive. And to begin with, observe this artist's honesty. If, indeed, the portraits of the crimson-faced and swollen Henry, and the haggard wanton, his daughter Elizabeth, were propagandist caricatures (and in *The Queen's Tragedy*, Elizabeth in her radiant, seductive youth is no less repulsive) why could not Benson have made Queen Mary charming? Quite simply he refused to tamper with what he thought the truth—he gave rein to that rather terrible realism which side by side with his mystical sense and creative imagination was so fast developing in him. Mary in this book is tragically impotent to charm, and half the time shocks, offends, and alienates her court, her country, and, as I said, so many moderns who were fain to love her.

Frankly, the title gives the book its key. The whole motive is failure within; from without, defeat. Mary dies quite sure that her husband scorns her, having left no heir, foreseeing Elizabeth's accession, and the collapse of her one hope, the restoration in England of Catholicism. No

death of her own body could compare with the spiritual ruin of one soul, even; and she foresaw that of an entire nation, and she felt that had *she* been other, all still might have been well. She had acted always for the best, and her action had brought ruin. There was her tragedy.

Her long increasing illness is described by Benson with extraordinary imaginative insight. How, one asks, could he possibly have known all that? Down to the least detail he is accurate—the hideous headache Mary's heavy doze in the arm-chair would have caused; the special horrors of that giddiness which sheer weakness puts into the brain. . . . Benson had not, it is true, been gravely ill himself; but I believe he must, already even, have felt ill, as nervous natures can; and he watched himself accurately, and multiplied his sensations, and surmised their analogies, and lit by sheer experiment upon others.[1] But upon the mysterious method of Death's coming, how did he alight so strangely well? How, so early in his career, was he so at home in those shadowy regions? I think the whole of that last chapter, in which "Mary the Queen decides her last matters and takes her leave" emigrates entirely from the ordinary realms of successful art into those of inspiration and of awe. I do not feel as if Benson himself quite realised how terribly and solemnly real a work he was creating. One day, at the stroke of the luncheon bell, he walked into the Llandaff House dining-room rubbing his hands with glee and in perfectly radiant spirits. "Queen Mary's d-d-dead," he exclaimed. "She has been dying all the morning. *Such* a death-bed—really, it's too moving—quite tremendous—but I am completely done up." "I think," my informant adds, "that he said it was the

[1] "Have you ever slapped your arm with a certain sort of primula?" he disconcertingly inquires of Mr. Rolfe. "It produces eczema."

best description of her death-bed he had ever seen." Is not that strange? After writing pages of such power and poignancy, it might well be wondered at that he should have been able to eat or talk at all. The chapel, one might have thought, would have summoned him, rather than the dining-room.[1]

In these experiences of the dying, which he undoubtedly perceives from within the sick woman's brain, he uses in a masterly way the data of external fact for the construction of her sense-hallucinations, and then, of her spiritual aspirations. Is not that as it should be? The priest in his red-crossed sulphur-coloured vestment becomes the misty figure with the enormous Sign of man's salvation at its back, and the Sun held to its heart. . . . The liveries of her servants, and the longed-for heir, give her the material for those troops of green- and white-clad children whose footsteps tinkle through her room, bringing with them all sweet memories of dew and sunlit dawn and breeze. Earlier in the book a true note was struck. "It is not," Jane Dormer said of the cold Queen, "that she has no heart, but that it has been broken too often, and she fears to show it now." And at the end, the exhausted woman finds that death was better than mere ceasing of life's old torment. "In te, Morte, si posa nostra ignuda natura, lieta no, ma sicura dall' antico dolor." Mary saw the utter failure of all her nature's effort; but even as Hugh Benson, braver than Leopardi, will one day cry out, "My whole Gospel is: There is no such thing as failure," so she is now longing to proclaim to all the world "how great and sweet was death." Viaticum came to her:

She was conscious of her body again now, her wasted

[1] He also wrote a small pamphlet for the Catholic Truth Society, comparing Mary's death-bed with Elizabeth's.

limbs, her shrunken breast; and through every fibre of it stole a sweetness. It was to that hideous and distorted thing that the sweet Body of her Lord had come; it was that piteous soul that had so toiled with troubles, and striven with desire and fierce passion, perplexed, buffeted, despised, that the stainless and tormented soul, the awful Divinity of the God whom she had so ineffectually tried to serve, had deigned to visit.

"*Jesu! Jesu!*" she whispered, "esto mihi *Jesu!* I have failed, dear Jesus, but Thou hast not."

So not even her poor love-story really ended, at the last, in tragedy.

And Hugh's mother wrote to him from Tremans:

I can't describe how it moves me, nor how in love with death it seems to make one. . . . This last half-hour we have followed her from *within;* it all moves round now—the strange spaces, the lawn, the sweet children, the turning to deeds of duty that have to be done, the appearance of faces and their disappearance, the utter helplessness, the sweetness of pardon and peace—all events, even to most of her Court having gone to Elizabeth—all in God's hands—no bitterness. The great Rites, and the lifted and interpenetrated soul—and the Coming of the Lord, the Sun of righteousness—it is all too much to speak of; it *did* happen *just so.*

It appears to me that *Richard Raynal, Solitary,* which he began early in 1905, was the direct expression of his inward craving for solitude. This was very strong at this period; I shall return to it explicitly in a later chapter. He kept his mother and some friends closely acquainted with the progress of the book, and on July 2, 1905, wrote to one of these:

My hermit comes to me straight from heaven. I am more certain that he exists than that I do.

He had written earlier to his mother that

the hermit moves me immensely; but it is either very good indeed, or very bad indeed; and I am not quite

sure which. It is extremely mystical, and written in perfectly plain English, hammered with great care, rather like *The Hill of Trouble*.[1] I find my handwriting becoming pointed and fifteenth century. I long to read it aloud to everybody.

June 30.

I have FINISHED the first draft of *The Hermit and the King*. It is so moving that I don't know what to do; and has a dull cynical introduction and cynical footnotes as a foil.

The book presented itself as a very free re-translation of a French version of an English MS. belonging to the end of the sixteenth century. This *Vita et obitus Dni. Ricardi Raynal Heremitæ* was given as written by Sir John Chadfield, the parish priest of the neighbourhood in which Richard Raynal had his cell, and as edited by Fr. Benson, with an elaborate introduction concerning the discovery of the MS. in Rome, with footnotes, and, above all, pointed excisions of Sir John's tedious disquisitions and moralising, at which the editor is never tired of poking fun.

Concerning this book, too, he was bombarded with questions as to whether it was fiction. People were furious when they found the introduction and notes were an elaborate "take in." Mrs. Craigie had certainly bewildered even the most cautious readers by her footnotes to the *School for Saints* and *Robert Orange*. Benson's device was but sketchily worked out compared to the enormously complicated machinery by which Mr. Montgomery Carmichael led practically every single critic to account his *Autobiography of John William Walshe* (a book allied in a hundred ways to *Richard Raynal*) to be true history. But I doubt if I am mistaken in putting down as the immediate

[1] By Mr. A. C. Benson. It was Mr. Reginald Balfour who supplied him with most, perhaps, of the facts he used in *Richard Raynal*. In collaboration, too, with him and Fr. Sebastian Ritchie of the Birmingham Oratory, he joined in composing the delightful *Child's Alphabet of Saints*.

occasion of his ingenious method, Mr. Rolfe's "translation" *Don Tarquinio*.[1]

It is—perhaps, though, because we *do* know that *Richard Raynal* is pure fiction—difficult to see how it could have been taken for a transcript. All manner of comments, appreciations, facts of observation, terms of comparison, even objects of sensation (as, for instance, colour, harped upon in a way quite unknown to mediaeval æstheticism, I think), belong utterly to the modern mentality. And these are far too integral to the book to be due to any mere translator's licence. Benson himself expected this to be seen, and was restless under accusations. He wrote:

> *The Light Invisible*, I should have thought, carried "fiction" written all over it. Not one review, and I have seen, I suppose, between fifty and a hundred, ever suggested that it was anything else. But, really, if anyone will take the trouble to read the title-page of *Richard Raynal*, I do not think he could possibly fall into the mistake again. A "translator" could not *possibly* write *The History of Richard Raynal, Solitary*, BY Robert Hugh Benson.

The story is fragmentary, and portrays the life of a young hermit from the time when the call of God came to him, bidding him visit the King—Henry VI presumably, for Benson affects that his MS. omits all names of places and persons and all dates, a proceeding which certainly saves a deal of trouble. The hermit goes to Westminster, announces to the sick youth his approaching "passion," which superinduces in the King an epileptic fit of a more or less mysterious kind; after the scourging, cajoling, and manifold temptation of the hermit, and finally the murderous attack upon him, a revulsion of feeling causes him to be

[1] *Don Tarquinio* certainly was to serve as model for the original plan of *St. Thomas of Canterbury*. One rather pathetic case was that of a lady who, sick of fiction, turned with relief to "real historical work like *Richard Raynal*." "But," she asked, "why *did* Fr. Benson leave out parts of the MS.?"

regarded as a saint, and to be set "with the rich in his death," to be laid on the king's own bed, and there to die.

There are three dominant *motifs* in the book: first, the life of inner solitude with God, that lofty form of prayer which has carried a man beyond the level, even, where he must *resist* nature; for now nature is no more a separation from God but a sacrament which brings Him near: second, the passion and pain incidental to all achievement of vocation: and third, the failure of the "world's coarse thumb and finger" to plumb the nature of this life and joy, and pain and death. The first of these he elaborated with the help of Görres and Richard Rolle of Hampden, finding himself unable to add the infusion of Cornelius Agrippa, to which Mr. Rolfe was constantly urging him. Certainly, he captures a most fresh and fragrant atmosphere, a Franciscan gaiety, and he is happy in the conspiration of Nature with the Supernatural in the praise of God. Extreme simplicity, perfect *cleanness*, much clear colour—yellows, skiey blues, all the tender greens of vegetation—characterise the life Raynal leads in his thatched hut in the forest. Benson deliberately leaves all dark or gloomy elements to one side at the first. This lovely life with God is to be sheer happiness, in which all creation, life of beast and bird and leaf, joins. Richard was a Parsifal, for whom Good Friday did but make the world sweeter and more "childlike pure" with flowers. *Exultavit spiritus meus.*

The hermit is himself *beautiful;* in feature, even: God's "darling," *specialissimus.* Into this resurrection of long-lost innocence had the earlier "passions" of penance and prayer elevated the young man; a completed passion was to perfect him into the likeness of the Crucified, and daring analogies are set forth between these Sufferers, scourged and flouted by the courts, and by men at arms, and by

the crowd, though certain biographers have before now far outstripped Hugh Benson in a like method of comparing St. Francis of Assisi with his Model.

Two strong contrasts are set beside the hermit: the rather dull, pious old priest (in whom Benson was fond of detecting himself, much to the annoyance of his worshippers, who preferred to find him in Richard Raynal. This idea never failed to provoke in him those gleeful giggles to which from time to time he fell a helpless victim); and the Ankret in his foul cell at Westminster, an assault upon the refined sensations of certain more fastidious among his readers, for which they have never quite forgiven him. Yet the Ankret, too, had his place in God's scheme of asceticism: this world, God might decree, might have to be neglected or even spurned; though just about this time Benson was writing to a friend: "I do not believe that lovely things have to be stamped upon. Should they not rather be led in chains?" But Richard Raynal had his escort of whatsoever things are beautiful, without even needing to enchain them. . . . However, a definite link may be noticed between Benson and Raynal's *King*. This it is impossible to explain, because the essence of it is in a certain negativeness, an inhibition of thought and judgment, a *bewilderment* in face of life, of the future, of duty, above all, of the Unknown. It was a kind of spiritual paralysis of which no account was to be given; in which you could only wait, dazed, somehow, by the unmanageable mystery of immediate life. It is hard to describe anything so essentially blank, and featureless, and numbing. Nor can I do other than dogmatically assert that Hugh, at his hours, experienced this, and strongly. Into the King, then, he put not a little of himself. Yet Raynal was indeed that emancipated self

Hugh prayed to be, and was not, though in the visioned possibility he found consolation. "All that I hoped to be, and was not, comforts me." "All I could never be: All, men ignored in me, this was I worth to God. . . ." So, after all, in a real sense Benson was Raynal too.

He loved this book, and to the end thought it the most artistic of his works. Perhaps in this he is right. With every part of it he found himself in sympathy. Even the red-faced Cardinal (do you notice how Benson hates "crimson-faced" men? The distaste keeps showing itself, in almost every book, of the historical sort at least) cannot go wholly unabsolved by him. But here, as ever, true to a strange quality in his artistic method, he throws a veil of doubt on the whole affair. As sub-title, summing up the book, he quotes from Seneca the saying that no great talent—not even, does he hint?—that of finding God in mystic prayer, has existed without an admixture of insanity.[1]

The *Mirror of Shalott*, which was being put into its final shape at Llandaff House, consisted of the ghost stories which he began in Rome, but were not published in book form till 1907. They appeared first in Catholic periodicals, and are said to have created, at first, the impression of being little more than "pot-boilers." They are, it will be remembered, stories put into the mouths of a group of priests assembled in what Benson names the Canadian Church of San Filippo in Rome. This is, of course, a kind of glorified San Silvestro, and the priests are of that predominantly unattractive type which perhaps reflects Hugh's rather aloof interior attitude, noticeable

[1] I do not know where Benson was at this time getting himself supplied with apt quotations from the classics. Every chapter in *The Queen's Tragedy* is prefaced by one. He certainly did not discover them himself, nor did he invent them. Nor was it Mr. A. C. Benson who provided them.

at this time, towards his fellow clergy, and which afterwards was so happily modified. He had, however, hoped, at first, to publish the stories he had finished together with some by his sister and others by a friend. The publishers to whom they were offered pointed out their lack of unity, and wanted Miss Benson to make them all Egyptian in setting, for in two of her tales she had used an Egyptian background with great success. She refused to do this, and pointed out that a unity was observable in them, owing to the gradual crescendo of the mystical note, while the contrasts of scene added necessary variety. While she deprecated her brother's discursiveness, she willingly accepted, from his stories, three, which she entitled *The Haunt of Death* (this is Mr. Percival's story in the *Mirror*, about that iron mine for which an exploration party in Wales had furnished Hugh with all the staging); *The House without a Soul* ("Mr. Benson's" very weird story); and a chapter entitled *The Music of the Other World. Nuremberg;* of which I can find no trace and no explanation. The idea of the whole book was, to picture forth "the world within the world," or, if you will, "the soul within the world." Collaboration between Hugh Benson and anyone else was, I believe, an impossibility, and the plan fell through. The ideal survived, however. In ghost stories, he argued, the "real thing" expresses itself as far as possible in a certain medium. They are the translation of the supernatural into the natural, and therefore only analogical to any true statement, even, of fact. Spiritual events undoubtedly (any Christian will admit) occur: *how* they occur, not we with our brains dependent upon matter for their imagery can define; whether individual portents have occurred—well, you must decide for yourself upon

the evidence. So the book begins, and so it ends. Meanwhile the stories move successfully upon the whole, and had no need of the author's continual reminder that they are very gruesome. Fr. Meuron "flashes his eyes dreadfully round the circle" and "dashes forward" in his emotion: pipes drop, cigarettes go out; "nerves thrill like a struck harp." We do not like being told when to jump.

There are but few personal reminiscences in this work. Cornwall and Wales give him background and something of their spiritually surcharged atmosphere. This may be significant: those districts are different enough, in psychic value, from opulent though fairy-haunted Sussex. In Fr. Maddox's story, too, there is a reflection, unless I am mistaken, of Lord Halifax's house, Garrowby, and very much more than a reflection of how Benson wrote his novels and *almost saw* the ghosts he longed quite to encounter. Later, in a chapter on his psychic experiences, or lack of them, and in that which deals with his Mysticism, I may venture to speak of his whole attitude towards the preternatural manifesting itself at different levels, such as (at lowest) clicks in furniture, mysterious steps, "sensed" presences; or (a little higher) unwonted thought-transference or self-hypnotism; or again, ecstasy, and the quieting of a soul for prayer, when the spiritual forces, evil equally with good, find so easy an access to its habitually sealed recesses. And here must enter the phenomena of madness and "possession" (which Benson believed so much supposed lunacy to be), and above all that summing up of the "Otherness," which the soul in moments of extreme inward silence diagnoses, into a Person, a Watcher, ready to invade if he be but given the opportunity. As well as ever in *The Necromancers*,

Benson here can create for us that horrible sense of silence round about us, in which dreadful forces are alert and watching us. All ages have felt this in their way: the Greeks especially, for whom the loveliness of the summer's noon-day sleep trembled easily towards the terrible; that was the moment when they "saw nymphs," and the Panic fear stirred their hair and blood. . . . And more, almost than in the later book, Benson here insists on the *corruption* of ordinary things—sometimes sheer bread and meat, sometimes of a whole art, like painting—by some indwelling spirit of evil.

Hugh Benson did not any more "play at ghosts" as he used in his undergraduate days, in the Fellows' garden of King's, pouncing on the runaway, and half killed with the delicious terror of himself being pounced upon; but he retailed these stories to the newer generation, round the fire, and, Mr. Shane Leslie tells us, his success was huge.

And—how strangely, it will seem to many—this man who mused upon tragic Queens a-dying, and philosophised upon the nature of the soul, and saw the whole world saturated with gigantic forces, good and evil, fighting for the destiny of humanity, was still boy enough to write with glee to a distant friend that he has resumed his ancient practice of making *caches*, and is hiding all sorts of trivialities, with inscriptions, in secret crannies of Cambridge and of Ely buildings. I suppose that at this moment fives-balls and buttons and halfpence, muffled in mottoes, are awaiting discovery in those walls, for the mystification of generations yet to be.

There is nothing left, I think, to be told about this three terms' sojourn at Llandaff House. Father Benson had not been idle during it; in fact, his literary output had been enormous. But he never had guessed that that

was to have been the chief occupation of his first year of priesthood. He wanted to act directly upon souls, and to administer those sacraments over which he knew himself to possess power. Moreover, unfamiliarity, too, may breed contempt, or at least, suspicion: very emphatically it must be said that this year of rather inevitable isolation accentuated, by a drop of bitterness, that dislike for his fellow clergy which, at first, was rather just a supercilious aloofness due to his fastidious bringing up and mercurial temperament. To this is due quite an appreciable part of the harshness with which, in his books, he draws them. In the next years of full sacerdotal life, this (for his soul was just and generous) will be put right; and it is here, in my opinion, that the true division in his life must be placed. Even Llandaff House was for him a period of preparation. The full and public life began at Cambridge Rectory.

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